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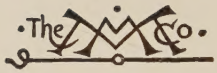

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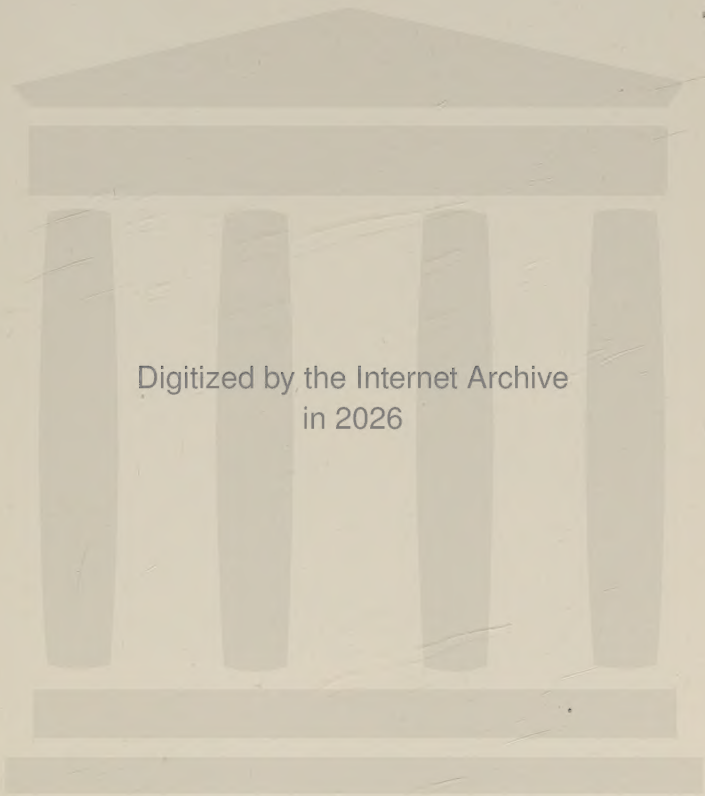
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THE CONVERSAZIONE

From Samuel Hoole's *Modern Manners* (1782)

THE SALON AND ENGLISH LETTERS

CHAPTERS ON THE INTERRELATIONS
OF LITERATURE AND SOCIETY
IN THE AGE OF JOHNSON

BY

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To

C. E. A.

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PART I

THE FRENCH BACKGROUND

CHAPTER I

Introduction

It is one of the venerable commonplaces of criticism that 'manners,' as distinct from romance and the idealistic interpretation of life, make the bulk of eighteenth century literature. Comment has often begun and more often ended with this platitude. But that large body of work vaguely termed 'literature of manners' can no more be dismissed with a truism than can the life that it depicts, but demands a critical method as varied as the matter which is treated. In so far as this prevailing interest of the century manifested itself in *belles lettres*, in novel, drama, satire, and descriptive verse, it offers no unusual problem to the literary historian; but side by side with such types we have forms no less characteristic of the age, but much less susceptible of adequate criticism: intimate biography, autobiography, memoirs, diaries, and familiar correspondence. These must of necessity be rather summarily passed over by the literary historian as not exclusively belletristic in appeal. And below these, in turn, there are certain expressions of the social spirit so anomalous that they can at most detain the critic but a moment, and must often be

dismissed with no consideration at all. Among these, intangible and evanescent by nature, yet of the first importance in bringing certain kinds of literature to birth, are conversation, the salon, the authors' club, and in general those forms of social activity which exist to stimulate the production or diffuse the appreciation of literature. These, which are in themselves no more literature than are painting and politics, come at times so close to it that dividing lines are blurred. A mere record of conversation, such as gives the pages of Boswell's *Johnson* or Fanny Burney's *Diary* their unique value, brings us to a borderland between society and letters where a distinction between them is merely formal. What is a critic to do with works which hardly sue for recognition as literature (though the world has so acclaimed them), but avowedly exist to record the delights of social intercourse? To treat them as 'mere literature,' neglecting the social life in which they sprang up and to which they are a tribute, is, to say the least, inadequate.

It is with this borderland, this territory where literature and society meet in mutual respect, and presumably to their mutual advantage, that I propose to deal in this volume. I shall trace as well as I can the attempt made in England between 1760 and 1790 to emulate the literary world of Paris by bringing men of letters and men of the world into closer relations, and by making the things of the mind an avocation of the drawing-room; and thereafter I shall endeavour

to show the results of this movement as they appear in the improved artistry of three or four types of writing.

So long as letters and society retained this intimate relation and men and manners were deemed the all-sufficient study of poets, it was natural that authors should gather in the metropolis. The city was to them 'the true scene for a man of letters'; 'the fountain of intelligence and pleasure,' the place for 'splendid society,' and the place where 'a man stored his mind better than anywhere else.'[1] When the old ideal of letters was displaced by a wider and perhaps nobler, the supremacy of the metropolis as a literary centre fell with it; but in the Age of Johnson London was still the land of promise, at once a workshop and a club, a discipline and an opportunity. 'A great city is, to be sure,' said Johnson, 'the school for studying life.' Johnson, Goldsmith, Burke, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Sheridan, Beattie, Chatterton, Crabbe, Boswell, and many another went up thither, as their predecessors for generations had done, to seek their literary fortune or to enjoy their new-established fame.

The authors' clubs, hardly less popular than in the days of Anne, indicate an even closer centralization. A theory of literature squarely based on reason and the tradition of the classics produced a solidarity of senti-

[1] Hume, Boswell, Burke, and Johnson are quoted in turn. The first reference is to Edinburgh, the rest to London.

ment among men of letters which was of great use in making their aims intelligible to society at large. Books were not meant to be caviare to the general. Poets did not strive to be nebulous. The ever growing democracy of readers honoured what it felt that it understood. King, Church, women of society, women of no society, painters, actors, and universities joined in paying respect to a literature that had not yet shattered into the confusion of individualism. The world of letters was, in a word, still a kingdom.

As in Paris, an alliance could, accordingly, be effected. The salon was the natural outgrowth of the intelligent interest of the reading world; it exhibited the same community of sentiment in readers that we have noticed in writers, and writers accordingly honoured it. In London, as in Paris, it became possible to find the men of light and leading gathered in a few places of favourite resort, in drawing-room or club. 'I will venture to say,' remarked Johnson[1] to a group of friends, 'there is more learning and science within the circumference of ten miles from where we now sit than in all the rest of the Kingdom;' and once, when the boasting fit was on him, he asserted that the company sitting with him round the table was superior to any that could be got together even in Paris.

It was no mean ideal of society that was held by groups such as these. Mere repartee, a display of rhetorical agility, was not its principal aim. The

[1] Boswell's *Life*, Hill's edition, 2. 75.

desire to be sound mingled with the desire to be clever, and produced that wisdom which the eighteenth century loved to call wit. Wit was aphoristically pretentious to truth. It was of course important to talk in the *mondaine* manner, but the *mondaine* ideal was to talk sense. There was a general willingness to give and to receive information in the ordinary social relations of life. Never to 'diffuse information,' to have 'nothing conclusive' in one's talk, was to fail. Johnson once contended that Goldsmith was not 'a social man': 'he never exchanged *mind* with you.'[1] Burke's conversation, on the other hand, delighted him because it was the ebullition of a full mind.[2] 'The man who talks to unburthen his mind is the man to delight you,' said he.[3] Cheerful familiarity was not the social ideal: true sociability was a communion of minds. Madame du Deffand summed up her criticism of a dinner at Madame Necker's in the words, 'I learned nothing there.'[4]

It was to an ideal thus frankly educational that the salon and the club responded. The passion for such society was like that which many serious souls to-day feel for the society of a university. To breathe the air of it was to grow in the grace of wisdom. In such an idealization of the social life, we may find the explanation of many so-called 'deficiencies' of the age, its indifference to Nature (whatever that may mean),

[1] Boswell's *Life* 3. 253.
[2] *Ib.*, 4. 167.
[3] *Ib.*, 3. 247.
[4] *Lettres à Walpole* 3. 338; 28 May 1777.

its preference for city life, its common sense, its dread of the romantic and the imaginary, and of all that seems to repudiate the intellectual life and its social expression.

Such was the delight in society felt by Hannah More and Fanny Burney in their younger days. Such was Boswell's delight. The greatness of the latter, so ridiculously aspersed, reposes entirely upon his realization of the importance of the social instinct. Boswell was not merely a social 'climber.' He was a man who had the sense to see a short-cut to education. To call him toad and tuft-hunter may be an ingenious display of one's vituperative gifts, but evinces a surprising ignorance of the fact that a man may educate himself by living contact with great minds.

It would be a simple explanation of all this respect for the salon and its discussions to observe that England was now enjoying an age of free speech. It is even simpler to point out that there was much discussion because there was much to discuss. There were problems confronting the public which were no less important than novel. This is all true, but somewhat lacking in subtlety. The peculiar adaptability of these problems to conversation was due to the fact that they were, in general, still problems of a remote and idealistic kind. They did not yet demand instant solution, for better or for worse. Exception must of course be made of questions purely political, but the rest of them — the theory of equality and the republican form of

government, the development of machinery, the education of the masses, humanitarianism, the problem of the dormant, self-satisfied, aristocratic Church, romanticism, and the whole swarm of theories popularized by Rousseau — had been stated and widely discussed, but they had not yet shaken society to its foundations. They were still largely theoretical. Men's thoughts were engaged, and their tongues were busy, but their hearts were not yet failing them for fear.

We may cite as a significant example the position of the lower classes. There had been as yet no serious disturbance of what Boswell loved to call 'the grand scheme of subordination.' Now Boswell was no fool. He was, in truth, singularly broad-minded; yet in such a matter as this his notions hardly rose above a benevolent feudalism. Despite his interest in Rousseau, despite his sympathy with Corsica and with America, he could record with bland approval Johnson's denunciation [1] of a young lady who had married with 'her inferior in rank,' and the Great Moralist's wish that such dereliction 'should be punished, so as to deter others from the same perversion.' Democracy could be little more than a theory to Johnson when he asserted [2] that 'if he were a gentleman of landed property he would turn out all his tenants who did not vote for the candidate whom he supported,' contending that 'the law does not mean that the privilege of voting should be independent of old family interest.' Again, when he ex-

[1] Boswell's *Life* 2. 328–29. [2] *Ib.*, 2. 340.

plained to Mrs. Macaulay 'the absurdity of the levelling doctrine' by requesting her footman to sit down and dine with them,[1] he conceived of himself as smashing a delusion with a single blow. Such 'levelling' notions being, for the moment, doctrinaire, might no doubt be put down by a sally of wit. With the fall of the Bastille they took on a different aspect.

Nor was the case widely different with writers less passionately conservative than Johnson. Horace Walpole had a dim perception that the trend of affairs was destructive of the old order, but he never suspected that the theories discussed in the salons were to have immediate practical results. His attitude is well shown by his account of certain Parisian *savants* who talked scepticism in the presence of their lacqueys. 'The conversation,' he writes, 'was much more unrestrained, even on the Old Testament, than I would suffer at my own table in England, if a single footman was present.'[2] Walpole was certainly no ardent defender of the orthodox faith, but sceptic as he was, he was not ready to meet all the issues involved in the spread of the doctrine. Religion, it seems, will still do very well for menials.

Even Hume and Gibbon, the darlings of the Parisian salon, conceived of the problems they themselves had helped to raise as largely speculative. Gibbon, for example, plumes himself on having vanquished the Abbé Mably in a discussion of the republican form of

[1] Boswell's *Life* 1. 447.

[2] *Letters* 6. 301.

government [1] — and this but a few years before the foundation of the two great republics of modern times. The irony of his triumph must, presently, have been clear to him, for on September 9, 1789, he wrote to Sheffield: 'What a scene is France! While the assembly is voting abstract propositions, Paris is an independent republic.' In the previous August he had expressed his amazement 'at the French Revolution.' We may perhaps reserve a portion of our amazement for the historian who had failed to realize that the theories with which he had been long familiar in the salons would one day cease to be mere matters of discussion.

This failure of English authors to come into full sympathy with the French doctrines of the hour is the more remarkable because Frenchmen had long regarded England as the home of reason and of liberty.[2] Indeed France had turned to England for that 'freedom of thought' denied to herself; but having adopted it, she had pushed it to extremes of which her teachers, conservative at heart, could never have conceived. D'Alembert, than whom the salons contained no more splendid figure, acknowledged in his *Essay on Men of Letters* that it was the works of English authors which had communicated to Frenchmen their precious liberty of thought.[3] So common is the praise of England that

[1] In his *Memoirs*.

[2] See Churton Collins' *Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau in England*, London 1908.

[3] *Essai sur la Société des Gens de Lettres et des Grands, sur la Réputation, sur les Mécènes, et sur les Récompenses Littéraires.* In his *Mélanges de Littérature et de Philosophie* (1753) 2. 119.

he now feels compelled to protest against the further progress of Anglicism.[1] But in vain. The decades passed by with no diminution of the respect for England. In 1763 Gibbon[2] still found English opinions, fashions, and games popular in Paris, every Englishman treated as patriot and philosopher, and the very name of England '*clarum et venerabile gentibus*.' In the next year Voltaire, who had done so much by judicious praise and injudicious blame to spread the knowledge of English literature and philosophy, addressed to the *Gazette Littéraire* a letter[3] containing a defence of the current Anglomania. In this he laughed at those who thought it a 'crime' to study, observe, and philosophize as do the English. A year later, Saurin's play, *l'Anglomanie*,[4] had appeared, and though its success on the stage was not great, Walpole thought it

[1] *Ib.* 2. 121. Cf. Helvétius to Hume (*Letters to Hume;* 28 June 1767). 'L'attraction de la terre Britannique agit puissament sur moi.'

[2] See his *Memoirs*.

[3] *Œuvres* (1819–25) 43. 320; 14 November 1764. The whole passage is worth quoting: 'Mille gens, messieurs, s'élèvent et déclament contre l'anglomanie: j'ignore ce qu'ils entendent par ce mot. S'ils veulent parler de la fureur de travestir en modes ridicules quelques usages utiles, de transformer un deshabillé commode en un vêtement malpropre, de saisir, jusqu'à des jeux nationaux, pour y mettre des grimaces à la place de la gravité, ils pourraient avoir raison; mais si, par hasard, ces déclamateurs prétendaient nous faire un crime du désir d'étudier, d'observer, de philosopher, comme les Anglais, ils auraient certainement bien tort: car, en supposant que ce désir soit déraisonable, ou même dangereux, il faudrait avoir beaucoup d'humeur pour nous l'attribuer et ne pas convenir que nous sommes à cet égard à l'abri de tout reproche.'

[4] Its first published title was *L'Orphéline Léguée*. See also Walpole's *Letters* 6. 360.

worth while to send Lady Hervey a copy of it as an example of a reigning fad. The leading character, Éraste, who affects a preference for Hogarth to all other painters, who quotes Locke and Newton, and drinks tea for breakfast, sums up his views in these verses:

> Les précepteurs du monde à Londres ont pris naissance.
> C'est d'eux qu'il faut prendre leçon.
> Aussi je meurs d'impatience
> D'y voyager. De par Newton
> Je le verrai, ce pays où l'on pense.

All this of course is farcical; but the author, a member of the French Academy, had a serious purpose. He was attacking an attitude which was expressed in Voltaire's well-known eulogy,

> Le soleil des Anglais, c'est le feu du génie.

Saurin, in his preface, announces his esteem for England and her authors, but declares that the popularity of the 'cult' is due to the jealous dislike by Frenchmen of their own authors — a conclusion not quite obvious. In any case, the academician felt that he had a duty to the nation. In 1772 he revised his comedy, and it was again performed.

But Anglomania lived on. English authors were still graciously received in the salons. Madame du Deffand dared to assert that they were completely superior to the French in all matters of reasoning.[1]

[1] *Correspondance*, ed. Lescure, 1. 497; 14 August 1768.

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The English language was increasingly studied, and English novelists and philosophers continued popular. Madame Necker records [1] an anecdote of a lady who went to England 'pour renouveler ses idées.' The lady was perhaps fulfilling Montesquieu's famous advice, to travel in Germany, sojourn in Italy, and think in England.

Anglomania was thus more than a passing fashion; it was but the superficial evidence of a respect for English philosophy of life which Frenchmen had taken more seriously than had the English themselves. It happened, as it has happened more than once, that English literature was more highly esteemed abroad than at home. 'Nous avons augmenté,' said Madame Necker to Gibbon,[2] 'jusque chez vous la célébrité de vos propres auteurs.' English novels were read in France for the new ideals of life which they were supposed to embody, and much that in England was a mere pastime — *Clarissa*, for example — became in France a philosophy of conduct. A philospher like Hume, and a philosophical historian like Gibbon, found that Paris delighted to honour the prophets whom England was too careless to stone.

The pupil had thus outrun his master, and had indeed become the master. In the earlier decades of the century, Voltaire and Montesquieu had gone to England to enjoy the privilege of thought: in the later dec-

[1] *Mélanges* 2. 240.

[2] Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works* 2. 178.

ades Englishmen visited Paris for a precisely similar purpose. From the middle of the century until the outbreak of war in 1778, Englishmen could discover in the conversations of the salons what a nation, always radical at heart, had made of the theories of free thought, liberty, and equality before the law, which they had, through Voltaire and Montesquieu, derived long since from England. English authors were received with a cordiality and a deference which had never been shown them in their own country. They found in Paris a social system conducted in honour of authors and of the philosophies which they were disseminating. It was the salon, the forcing-bed of the new ideas.

CHAPTER II

Origin and Characteristics of the Salon

The one unfailing characteristic of the salon, in all ages and in all countries, is the dominant position which it gives to woman. It is woman who creates the peculiar atmosphere and the peculiar influence of salons; it is she, with her instinct for society and for literature, who is most likely to succeed in the attempt to fuse two ideals of life apparently opposed, the social and the literary. The salon is not a mere drawing-room and not a lonely study, but mediates between the promiscuous chatter of the one and the remote silence of the other. The aims of the salon are well shown by the ridicule of those enemies who accuse the hostess of attempting to transform a school of pedants and hacks into a group of courtiers. The social world is likely to laugh at the salon because it suggests the lecture-hall, and scholars sneer at it because it pretends to the distinction of a literary court.

The first salons were indeed courts — the courts of the Italian Renaissance. We find in the Parisian salons of later centuries the *disjecta membra* of this earlier Italian society, whose true relationship is understood only when we trace them back to this remote

original. In the light of that Italian dawn, all leaps into a consistent scheme. Much that seems odd and unrelated in salon life is brought into perspective: the authoritative position of the scholar, the unique influence of woman, and the tendency to set up 'Platonic' relations between the sexes. Humanism, Platonism, and gallantry were aspects of the Renaissance and of the Italian Court, and in their lesser manifestations as learning, philosophism, and 'Platonic love,' they remain characteristic of salons. Again, the courts of the fifteenth century brought into focus many movements: they carried on the mediæval system of patronage; they adopted many of the gallantries of the old 'courts of love'; and they brought the new humanism into vital contact with society, so that the expression of serious thought was no less possible in conversation than in the study or the lecture-hall. Each of these lives on in the salon.

The Renaissance court may be studied in any one of a numerous group. We may find the ideal set forth in the group of artists and men of letters who surrounded the youthful Beatrice d'Este, patroness of Leonardo and many another; we may see it in the court of her sister, Isabella, Marchioness of Mantua; we may see it in the coterie of Caterina Cornaro, once Queen of Cyprus, and in her later days mistress of a little court [1]

[1] The ideal of a group of ladies and gentlemen who seek in literature the pleasantest of entertainment is of course encountered in Italian literature long before this time. The singular vitality of the scheme adopted by

at Asolo. We may study it at its grandest in the somewhat earlier court of Lorenzo the Magnificent, with its conscious imitation of the Greek symposium. The court which held Politian, Pulci, Ficino the Platonist, Alberti, and, later, Michelangelo, might well have boasted itself 'the little academe' of *Love's Labour's Lost.* But perhaps the most useful example is the delightful court of Urbino, described by Castiglione in his *Cortegiano.*

If it be objected that Castiglione's description of court life is too radiant to be quite true to fact, if it be a society fairer than any whose existence can be demonstrated, I reply that it is so much the better suited to our purpose. It is ideals that we would be at. We are spared the attempt to reconstruct them for ourselves. There is nothing to be gained by reminding ourselves that courts attracted the parasite, the flatterer, and the opportunist; it is the finer aims of the men of genius and of the noble women who patronized them that will reward our attention. Castiglione knew these aims, and we cannot do better than quote his words as they were given to Elizabethan England in Hoby's beautiful translation.[1] The first quotation refers to Frederick, first Duke of Urbino:

Boccaccio for the framework of the *Decameron* is proved by the numerous imitations of it. The Petrarchists, as well as Boccaccio, found favour in the eyes of the court-ladies.

[1] *The Book of the Courtier,* from the Italian of Count Baldassare Castiglione, done into English by Sir Thomas Hoby. Edited by Professor Raleigh. London, 1900. See pp. 29 ff.

This man emong his other deedes praisworthy, in the hard and sharpe situation of Urbin buylt a Palaice, to the opinion of many men, the fayrest that was to be founde in all Italy, and so fornished it with everye necessary implement belonging thereto, that it appeared not a palaice, but a Citye in fourme of a palaice, and that not onlye with ordinarie matters, as Silver plate, hanginges for chambers of verye riche cloth of golde, of silke and other like, but also for sightlynesse: and to decke it out withall, placed there a wonderous number of auncyent ymages of marble and mettall, verye excellente peinctinges and instrumentes of musycke of all sortes, and nothinge would he have there but what was moste rare and excellent. To this with verye great charges he gathered together a great number of most excellent and rare bookes, in Greke, Latin and Hebrue, the which all he garnished wyth golde and sylver, esteaming this to be the chieffest ornament of his great palaice. . . .

We turn now to the court of his son Guidobaldo, who carried on the traditions of his father:

He sett hys delyte above all thynges to have hys house furnished with most noble and valyaunte Gentylmen, wyth whom he lyved very famylyarly, enjoying theyr conversation wherein the pleasure whyche he gave unto other menne was no lesse, then that he receyved of other, because he was verye wel seene in both tunges, and together with a lovynge behavyour and plesauntnesse he had also accompanied the knowleage of infinite thinges. . . . Because the Duke used continuallye by reason of his infirmytye, soon after supper to go to his rest, everye man ordinarelye, at that houre drewe where the Dutchesse was, the Lady Elizabeth Gonzaga. Where also continuallye was the Lady Emilia Pia, who for that she was endowed with so livelye a wytt and judgement as you knowe, seemed the maistresse and ringe leader of all the companye,

and that everye manne at her receyved understandinge and courage.[1] There was then to be hearde pleasaunte communication and merye conceytes, and in every mannes countenaunce a manne myght perceyve peyncted a lovynge jocundenesse. So that thys house truelye myght well be called the verye mansion place of Myrth and Joye. And I beleave it was never so tasted in other place, what maner a thynge the sweete conversation is that is occasioned of an amyable and lovynge companye, as it was once there. . . . But such was the respect which we bore to the Dutchesse wyll, that the selfe same libertye was a verye great bridle. Neither was there anye that thought it not the greatest pleasure he could have in the worlde, to please her, and the greatest griefe to offende her. For this respecte were there most honest condicions coupled with wonderous greate libertye, and devises of pastimes and laughinge matters tempred in her sight. . . . The maner of all the Gentilmen in the house was immedyatelye after supper to assemble together where the dutchesse was. Where emonge other recreations, musicke, and dauncynge, whiche they used contynuallye, sometyme they propounded feate questions, otherwhyle they invented certayne wytty sportes and pastimes, at the devyse sometyme of one sometyme of an other, in the whych under sundrye covertes,[2] often tymes the standers bye opened subtylly theyr imaginations unto whom they thought beste. At other tymes there arrose other disputations of divers matters, or els jestinges with prompt inventions. Manye times they fell into purposes,[3] as we now a dayes terme them, where in thys kynde of talke and debating of matters, there was wonderous great pleasure on all sydes: because (as I have sayde) the house was replenyshed wyth most noble wyttes.

[1] Spirit.

[2] Figures, allegories.

[3] 'Arguments,' discussions, such as the one that follows on the nature of the true courtier.

Such conversational 'pastimes' were enjoyed almost every night:

And the order thereof was such, that assoone as they were assembled where the Dutches was, every man satt him downe at his will, or as it fell to his lot, in a circle together, and in sittinge were devyded a man and a woman, as longe as there were women, for alwayes (lightlye) the number of men was farr the greater. Then were they governed as the Dutchesse thought best, whiche manye times gave this charge unto the L. Emilia.

Il Cortegiano is the tribute paid to this group and the conversation which passed in it. The spirit of the book is not to be shown by a few quotations, but a reading of it will reveal the following facts: that men and women meet on a plane of equality, that it is the presence of women (though fewer in number than the men), that gives the peculiar tone of lightness and gallantry; that the author looks to the court not only for reward, but for inspiration; that the conversation at its noblest (as in Bembo's discourse at the end) passes over into poetry; that the conversation is of a classical and philosophic cast, often Platonic, but that this high seriousness does not exclude mirth and wit.[1]

[1] The following anecdote of a warrior who affirmed that the entertainments of the Court were beneath him, may be cited as a specimen: 'The Gentlewoman demaundyng him, What is then your profession? He aunswered with a frowning looke: To fight. Then saide the Gentlewoman: Seing you are not nowe at the warre nor in place to fight, I woulde thinke it beste for you to bee well besmered and set up in an armorie with other implementes of warre till time wer that you should be occupied, least you waxe more rustier than you are.' p. 49.

Now these aims are no other than the aims of the salon.

This ideal, diffused over Europe, had a long and brilliant history. We shall encounter it again in the courtly salons of Elizabethan England, and even in the comedies of Shakespeare. The tradition passed over into France and there became the formative influence in the great type and parent of the Parisian salon, the Hôtel de Rambouillet.

In tracing the Hôtel de Rambouillet back to the earlier Italian court, two facts stand out as of first importance. In the first place, that salon was established by a woman who was herself half Italian, had passed many years in Italy, and knew the traditions of the old nobility. In the second place, the Hôtel de Rambouillet originated in protest against the crudities of the Gascon court at Paris, and represented an attempt to realize a worthier society.

When, in the second decade of the seventeenth century, Cathérine de Vivonne opened her famous house in the Rue Saint Thomas du Louvre and initiated the reign of good taste in France, her salon displayed almost immediately certain aspects which had distinguished the Italian courts and which were to become, in varying degrees, permanent features of the Parisian salon and of its London counterpart. The Marquise de Rambouillet became the type and exemplar of all the later hostesses. Even the English bluestockings were aware that they were in the line of descent from her. In her

poem *Bas Bleu*,[1] Hannah More compares the English group with that which met in the Hôtel de Rambouillet, and Wraxall [2] later took up the comparison and developed the parallel between the drawing-rooms of London and those of Paris. The Hôtel de Rambouillet, therefore, is the type of the salon. It enables us to distinguish what is permanent and common to all salons, from what is merely transitory. For the sake of convenience, I shall make a fivefold grouping of these features. It will of course be understood that this analysis does not afford a complete characterization of the Hôtel de Rambouillet; for that society had certain important aims — such as the attempt to purify the language — which were not destined to remain permanent marks of the succeeding salons, and are therefore passed over in silence. Nor must it be assumed that the fivefold analysis describes each and every later salon. A given salon may be entirely lacking in one of the features — though never, I think, in a majority of them — without losing its character; and in proportion as a given salon satisfies these five conditions, we may say that it approaches the ideal.

(1) In the first place, then, the house, the very

[1] See below, p. 124.

[2] *Historical Memoirs* 1. 14. Chesterfield, who knew the salons at first hand, writes to his son, 24 December 1750, 'Le bon goût commença seulement à se faire jour, sous le règne, je ne dis pas de Louis Treize, mais du Cardinal de Richelieu, et fut encore épuré sous celui de Louis Quatorze. . . . Vers la fin du règne du Cardinal de Richelieu, et au commencement de celui de Louis Quatorze, l'Hôtel de Rambouillet était le Temple du Goût, mais d'un goût pas encore tout à fait épuré.' *Letters*, ed. Bradshaw, 1. 382.

room, in which the company gathers, is influential in forming its spirit and establishing its reputation. We have just examined Castiglione's description of the magnificence of Urbino: something of that royal splendour is demanded of the salon. It was Madame de Rambouillet's sense for architectural arrangement and decoration that contributed to her social success. Indeed the name by which her salon is known plainly implies it. As is well known, she began by breaking up the great reception-hall with its vast, unsocial coldness into a series of smaller rooms and alcoves, thus providing for the intimacies of conversation as distinct from the hubbub and the crowd. Her own favourite room, the *chambre bleu d'Arthénice*,[1] where a privileged few — at most eighteen — sat by her couch, was the centre and soul of the house. It was the perfumed temple of the Graces, where the year was always at spring, the haunt of Flora, and the throne of Athena herself. This room reproduced itself in countless 'alcoves,' 'blue rooms,' and *ruelles* throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Madame de Boufflers was famous for her apartments hung with rose-coloured damask, and Madame Geoffrin for her house, which was crammed with rare china and bronzes, portraits by Boucher, and easel-pictures by Van Loo.

(2) The salon must retain an aristocratic tone, but without submitting to the unyielding formality of the

[1] 'Arthénice' is an anagram of her name, Cathérine. It is said to have been discovered by Malherbe.

aristocracy. It sets up a standard of recognition based on talent,[1] and neither courts nor rejects the nobility. It was even possible for the bourgeois to obtain admission to the Hôtel de Rambouillet and to have a career there. Vincent Voiture, known as 'Chiquito,' the son of a wine-merchant, became the leading spirit in all the amusements. His position reminds us now of the mediæval jester, now of Beau Nash, the King of Bath.

In the eighteenth century the salons are proud to represent a democracy of genius. Madame Geoffrin was the daughter of a *valet de chambre* and the wife of a manufacturer; Madame Necker was the daughter of a Swiss parson; and Mlle. de Lespinasse, a foundling, who had been 'humble companion' to Madame du Deffand, and who had not means sufficient to entertain her guests at dinner. Wit, intellect, and personality, rather than noble birth, became the key to social success.

(3) The chief staple of entertainment offered by the salons is conversation, literary or philosophical in character. Other amusements, such as Castiglione describes at Urbino, are not necessarily excluded, and, in France, dancing, excursions, card-playing, and gaming were popular in various salons and at various times. But conversation always reasserted itself in

[1] This, too, is Italian. Cf. Burckhardt, *Renaissance in Italy*, tr. Middlemore, p. 359: 'Social intercourse in its highest and most perfect form now ignored all distinctions of caste, and was based simply on the existence of an educated class.'

the end. Discussion was stimulated by the reading of original poems, essays, sermons, and plays. The criticism of these, especially of the plays, was of no mean importance in forming the spirit of French literature. In particular the salon gives birth to certain minor forms of literature, epistles, epigrams, extempore verses of all kinds, 'thoughts,' maxims, *bons mots*, 'portraits,' and *éloges;*[1] but of more importance than these is its unconscious formative influence on such arts as letter-writing, biography, and all manner of anecdotal writing.

(4) The friendships of the salon are of peculiar depth and warmth, developing occasionally into passion, but always Platonic rather than domestic in their expression. Thus the salon, in which woman assumes the throne, and queens it over a coterie (chiefly men) is perhaps the last phase of the Italian court with its gallantries and lady-worship. It passed on to the French salon that note of sentiment and Platonic love which is found in *Il Cortegiano*, and which becomes characteristic of Sappho Scudéry and the later seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century this sentimental friendship united with the more practical system of patronage, and resulted in a type of relationship which eludes definition, for, on the one hand, it is at times so utilitarian as to savour of phi-

[1] Thus Mascarille in *Les Précieuses Ridicules:* 'Vous verrez courir de ma façon, dans les belles ruelles de Paris, deux cents chansons, autant de sonnets, quatre cents épigrammes, et plus de mille madrigaux, sans compter les énigmes et les portraits.'

lanthropy, and, on the other, it may develop into a *grande passion*, and compare itself to Abelard and Héloïse. Examples of it are the various relations existing between Madame Geoffrin and Marmontel, Madame du Deffand and d'Alembert, Madame du Deffand and Horace Walpole, Madame de Boufflers and David Hume, Mlle. de Lespinasse and d'Alembert, Mlle. de Lespinasse and Guibert, Madame Necker and Edward Gibbon.

(5) The hostess of the salon is invariably the subject of ideal descriptions, 'tributes' which recite her charm as a hostess, her merits as a patron, and her general superiority to the Muses. From Castiglione's eulogy of Elizabeth Gonzaga, through the Hôtel de Rambouillet (where Malherbe was a kind of poet laureate), down to the death of Mlle. de Lespinasse, whose genius was celebrated by d'Alembert in the *Tombeau de Mlle. de Lespinasse*, this is an almost unfailing result of salon life.

Such are, then, the permanent marks by which we may detect that interplay of the social and the literary life in what, for want of a better term, we call the salon. There are two features of the life manifested only at certain times which it is not proper to include, though they are more generally attributed to the salons than any that have been mentioned. They are transitory phases; but they must be briefly considered, if only by way of avoiding false assumptions.

The women of the salons are usually thought of as

femmes savantes, or 'learned ladies,' who affect a learning which has no basis in fact. Such female pedants were common figures in the salons of a certain period. The depiction of them by Molière is no more exaggerated than the purposes of comic art demand. It must be further admitted that such women may appear now and again in the salons of any period; we shall meet with a few in the pages of this volume. But they are not *common* in the best salons of the best periods. Neither in the beginning, nor in the eighteenth century, were the hostesses of the salon what we ordinarily mean by the phrase *femmes savantes*. Of Madame de Rambouillet, for example, M. Vourciez writes:[1] 'Ce sont les aliments les plus solides qu'elle digérait sans prétention à devenir une "femme savante," car Balzac eût pu lui adresser à elle aussi le compliment qu'il fit à Madame des Loges: "Vous savez une infinité de choses rares, mais vous n'en faites pas la savante, et ne les avez pas apprises pour tenir école."' As for the women of the next century, they assisted their friends chiefly by qualities which have little to do with book-learning, by superb intelligence, wit, sympathy, and good taste. They made no pretence to erudition. Indeed they rather piqued themselves on their ignorance of it. To mistake Madame Geoffrin, who said she could not spell, and Madame du Deffand, who was bored by a *savant*, for a woman like Armande

[1] Petit de Julleville, *Histoire de la Langue et de la Littérature Française* 4. 105.

or Bélise is to have done with all distinctions at once. It is to confound Prospero with Polonius.

It is no less true that the women of the salons were not permanently *précieuses ridicules*. Preciosity had its day; it did its work (which was by no means contemptible); and it was laughed out of existence. There were no *précieuses* in 1750. Indeed the caustic penetration of Madame du Deffand,[1] the homely wit of Madame Geoffrin, and the romantic ardour of Mlle. de Lespinasse are at equal removes from the conceits and the mincing niceties of the earlier salons. 'Il n'y a que le premier pas qui coûte,' said Madame du Deffand of Saint Denis walking with his severed head in his hands; 'Je suis une poule qui ai couvé des œufs de canard,' said Madame Geoffrin of herself and her daughter; 'Presque personne n'a besoin d'être aimé,' said Mlle. de Lespinasse to her faithless lover. Is this the language of preciosity?

[1] She sneered at *précieuses*. *Lettres à Walpole* 1. 417.

CHAPTER III

The Eighteenth Century Salon

A salon is not a mere literary club. It is something other than a group of men and women gathered in a drawing-room to discuss literature or meet a poet. It aims to exert a creative influence in the literary world. It does not concern itself with literature as a finished product to be studied, but with literature as a growing thing that may be trained. Hence it gets behind the product to the producer, and seeks to influence the characters and ideas out of which books are formed. It is an informal academy. Its aim is private in that it is directly concerned with improving the condition of authors, and public in that it attempts to mould public opinion.

Thus it is, at bottom, a system of patronage. It offers to the author that aid, advertisement, and protection which he had once sought from a patron. Patronage of literature was, as we have seen, an essential feature of the court life of the Renaissance. It had lived on through the seventeenth century at courts and in noble houses. During its rapid decline in the eighteenth century, many of its duties were taken over by the salons. In the person of the hostess, the salon

made gifts of money, granted unofficial pensions, paid printers' bills, and even gave authors a home. Walpole was amused at the number of authors who were 'planted' in the homes of French ladies. Madame Geoffrin in Paris, like Mrs. Montagu in London, was recognized as a patron of all the arts, and both gave of their wealth to the support of indigent or improvident authors.

But the salon bestowed a yet more valuable favour in its recognition of literary merit. Like the patron, it vouched for new authors. It gave its support to their new ideas. And in this subtler form of patronage, in the discharge of the duties of a literary jury or academy, it anticipated the modern press, for it had similar influence and fell into similar errors. Like the modern critical review, it was at once feared and courted by authors who affected at times to despise its pronouncements but never ignored them. The salon mediated between the author and the public. It aimed, like a true critic, to correct both the conceit of the author and the indifference of the world. It responded to a genuine critical demand created by the disappearance of the outworn system of patronage and by the rapid growth of a reading democracy. The salon sprang into renewed activity during a period of transition. It served a peculiar need during changing conditions, and passed away with the dawn of a new century which had its own system of criticism by which to dispense fame and to create opinion.

The growing spirit of independence in the author had already caused grave dissatisfaction with the old order of things, as the increasing tendency to enjoy the society of his fellows in clubs and taverns had prepared the author for the new order of social patronage. D'Alembert, in his *Essay on Men of Letters*, speaks of the old system in terms of strong disgust. The rôle of courtier is the most despicable that can be acted by a man of letters. Authors and peers should meet on a plane of equality. 'Les seuls grands Seigneurs dont un homme de lettres doive désirer le commerce, sont ceux qu'il peut traiter et regarder en toute sûreté comme ses égaux et ses amis.' [1] Here is a man who will not lightly expose himself to feel the sting of charity, for whom a new system not wanting in grace and true appreciation must be devised. The *Essay* was translated into English in 1764. The original must have been written about the time when Johnson was penning his immortal definition of *patron*, 'a wretch who supports with insolence and is paid with flattery.'

Was it possible for the reading world to render assistance to men of this temper? Could a way be found to make grants of money or to draw attention to worthy writings without an offensive display of philanthropy? Was it not possible to assist an author, yet cause him to feel that any favour was conferred

[1] *Essai sur les Gens de Lettres, etc., op. cit.* 2. 136. Cf. Goldsmith, *Citizen of the World*, 84: 'A writer of real merit now may . . . talk even to princes with all the conscious superiority of wisdom.'

by himself? The salon was the answer. It summoned authors out of their seclusion and segregation, and confidently bade them show the world that genius might express itself elsewhere than in the study or the coffee-house. Let them try an appeal to a 'select public.' Let them, by the charm of their conversation in a congenial company, break down the barriers of indifference and prejudice. It was a call to men of letters to treat with the world. The drawing-room in which they were received, not as a dependent or tool, but as chief guests doing honour to the company by their presence, was a new field of arbitration between authors and the world.

In the successful execution of any plan for the social recognition of letters, woman must have a prominent place. If the drawing-room is to replace the tavern as a favourite resort of authors, the presence of woman is as truly implied in the one as her absence is from the other. The shift from the coffee-house to the drawing-room was indeed a plain tribute to woman, the new critic and the new patron. As she was already displaying her power in the world of readers by bringing a new tone of refinement into literature, she was exerting the same power to draw the men of letters into her salon.[1]

[1] 'Collé regrettera toujours les cafés littéraires et ne se consolera pas de les voir déserter pour les salons.' Petit de Julleville, *Histoire de la Littérature Française*, 6. 388. It was a significant moment in the history of the Literary Club in London when, about 1780, it fell into the habit of dining at Mrs. Vesey's before its more exclusive sessions at the tavern.

It was the peculiar fortune of France to produce women to discharge this social and literary duty whose personality is at once so brilliant and so influential that it rises to the level of genius. These women are not merely persons gifted with an instinct for social leadership; they are, like Cleopatra and Elizabeth, types of their sex and a revelation of its power. They are the very symbols of the century, 'the abstract and brief chronicles of the time.' In the amazing career of Madame de Tencin may be read the abandoned profligacy with which the seventeenth century closed, and which, in sheer disillusion, turned with the new century to decency and to letters. In Madame Geoffrin we see the surpassing common sense of the period, its force, its humour, its kindliness, and perhaps something of its hardness. As the best of the bourgeois is typified in Madame Geoffrin, the aristocracy of the *ancien régime* is expressed in Madame du Deffand. Its merciless clarity, its wit, which is wisdom in masquerade, its hardness of heart and contempt of spiritual things, and, one is tempted to say, even its blindness, are they not found in her? And the desolation of her last years, with their appealing cry for love, are they not, as Lanson has said,[1] the hunger of the heart which turns at last to the gift of love and the sweetness of tears? But it is Mlle. de Lespinasse who reveals

[1] 'Comme son siècle, Madame du Deffand, dans son extrême viellesse, retrouva le don d'aimer et la douceur des larmes.' Lanson, *Choix de Lettres*, quoted by Mrs. Toynbee in *Lettres à Walpole* 1. lx.

romanticism in its full blow. In the history of that movement the tornado of passions which convulsed her spirit and at length destroyed her are no less typical than the sorrows of Werther, or the pageant of Byron's bleeding heart.[1]

It was by force of personality and by their attitude towards life that these women succeeded in influencing literary movements. It is not by learning or authorship that they hold a place in the history of French literature. Not one of them was known to her own circle as an author or as ambitious to become one. Madame de Tencin was, to be sure, a novelist, but she concealed the fact from all her friends save Montesquieu and Fontenelle, allowed her works to be attributed to others, and kept her secret as long as she lived. Madame du Deffand and Mlle. de Lespinasse have attained fame as letter-writers, but through no conscious effort on their part. Their dread of authorship is easily explained. A successful hostess must avoid giving the impression that she is forming a coterie in order to have readers for her books. Madame du Bocage found her authorship of no assistance in her career as hostess: she was laughed at as a *femme savante*, and her guests were said to be invited for the purpose of praising her poems.

As personality is of more consequence to the hostess

[1] 'Elle symbolise l'évolution qui, à l'époque où elle vécut, s'est opérée dans l'âme de ses contemporains, lorsque de raisonneur le siècle s'est fait passionné, de libertin sentimental.' Ségur, *Julie de Lespinasse*, p. 15.

than authorship, so maturity of experience is of more value to her than youth and beauty. None of these women, except Madame du Bocage ('forma Venus, arte Minerva') pretended to the fascinations of youth. Madame de Tencin was forty-six when her salon became famous; Madame Geoffrin was fifty when she succeeded Madame de Tencin as the chief hostess in Paris, and she was sixty-seven when, as 'queen-mother,' she made her triumphal visit to the King of Poland. Madame du Deffand was sixty-eight when, in the eyes of Walpole, she eclipsed all the other hostesses in Paris; when she was eighty, Edward Gibbon still found in her salon, 'the best company in Paris.' Julie de Lespinasse, the youngest of them all, died — and died of love — at forty-four. It is not surprising that Walpole found in Paris the 'fountain of age.' [1] 'One is never old here,' he writes, 'or never thought so'; and elsewhere,[2] 'The first step towards being in fashion is to lose an eye or a tooth. Young people I conclude there are, but where they exist I don't guess: not that I complain; it is charming to totter into vogue.' Ten years later he finds no change: [3] 'It is so English to grow old! The French are Struldbrugs improved. After ninety they have no more caducity or distempers, but set out on a new career.'

Laurence Sterne goes into greater detail. Of the

[1] *Letters* 6. 393.

[2] *Ib.* 6. 367; 2 December 1765.

[3] *Ib.* 9. 252; [? September] 1775.

second period in the life of a French woman of fashion, he says:[1] 'When thirty-five years and more have unpeopled her dominions of the slaves of love, she repeoples it with the slaves of infidelity.' Here of course is a glance at the atheism of the *philosophes*. In morals, politics, and philosophy, the Parisian salon is frankly on the radical side. It not only welcomes new ideas, but goes in search of them. Radicalism becomes its measure of success. The prevailing hostility to the Church and the contempt for anything savouring of dogma caused those who might hold orthodox or conservative views to conceal them, lest they be taken as evidence of a cowardly spirit or a feeble mind. Adherents of the Church, priests, Jesuits, the whole tribe of *dévots*, and at last even the deists, were condemned as pharisees and time-servers. Voltaire himself was too cautious. 'Il est bigot,' said a woman to Walpole,[2] 'c'est un déiste.' When Hume was admitted to Madame Geoffrin's, he found no deists there, for all had, presumably, passed on to atheism. Madame Geoffrin herself retained an odd sort of formal relation with the Church which amazed her friends who whispered about it as though it were some scandalous *liaison*.

Thus the salons developed a looseness of morals and

[1] *Sentimental Journey*.

[2] *Letters* 6. 352; 19 November 1765. Cf. Madame du Deffand to Walpole (*Letters* 1. 385; 30 January 1768): 'Vous n'aimez pas les impiétés, vous êtes, ce me semble, un peu dévot.'

a so-called freedom of thought which their exponents were fain to regard as a splendid audacity. Such ideals are still dear to a certain class of writers chiefly composed of minor poets. But the wits of the eighteenth century promulgated their doctrines without the aid of that slovenliness which is indispensable to our free-thinking Bohemians. They adopted a manner approved of the world in order that they might win the world. They avoided anything that might make themselves or their speculations ridiculous, for they wished to *recommend* their theories to men, to challenge their intelligence, and to capture their interest. There is an odd simile used by Madame Necker[1] to account for Shakespeare's fame in England, which is of no use whatever as explaining Shakespeare, but of great significance because of its obvious reference to the salons. She attributes the renown of the poet to the acting of Garrick who, for three hours daily, *captures the hearts* as well as the ears of the English people, and so has the same effect that is produced in Paris by *conversation*. The aim of the salon is, obviously, to create interest, to capture hearts. In the same letter, when urging Gibbon to come to Paris and enjoy the fruits of his fame, she says, 'C'est là seulement . . . qu'on fait passer ses sentiments dans l'âme des autres.' There is the express aim of the salon: — to bring ideas out of the realm of the abstract down to the business

[1] Letter to Gibbon, 30 September 1776; in Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works* 2. 178.

and bosoms of men. In such a process it is the function of the hostess to give unity and solidity to the divergent views of her coterie, and frequently to be the channel by which they reach the world.[1] Thus the salon became a source for the dissemination of ideas and of a new and radical philosophy.

But what of the influence of the salon upon the authors who composed it? That it produced an effect upon them the least sympathetic was obliged to acknowledge: 'At worst,' says Walpole,[2] 'I have filled my mind with a new set of ideas.' There men corrected as well as expanded their personal views. There they might 'clarify their notions by filtrating them through other minds.'[3] The salon gave an opportunity for the development of ideas in a new medium — the liveliness of conversation. At such time, when the formulation of opinion is stimulated by contact with other minds, when all barriers are down, all dread of critics forgotten, a man may give free rein to his doctrines and borrow all the brilliancy that lives in exaggeration.[4] The pomposity of the plat-

[1] This function is admirably expressed by Professor Brunel in his account of Madame de Tencin (Petit de Julleville, *Histoire de la Littérature Française* 6. 403): '[Elle les ramenait] sans cesse au ton léger qui convient, même en un sujet grave Tel est bien le rôle d'une femme au milieu de ces têtes pensantes. Elle se tient audessus et au dehors du débat, qu'elle envisage au seul point de vue d'agrément, et dont elle règle la marche, toujours souriante, sans le laisser languir ni s'aigrir.'

[2] *Letters* 6. 414; 3 February 1766.

[3] Boswell's *Life of Johnson* 3. 47.

[4] Madame Necker speaks of the 'art perfectionné de l'exagération,' in the letter to Gibbon cited above.

form and the solemn pedantry of the study disappear, and a man talks for the joy of talking. He makes up in vivacity what he loses in dignity. When an author deserted the salons, as did Rousseau, it frequently indicated a state of self-absorption which was not always advantageous; and, on the other hand, when an author made his submission to them, the result was frequently evident in a note of urbanity and in a piquancy of illustration which he could hardly have attained elsewhere.[1] Thus the function of the salon was to preserve the sanity and clarity of literature, to keep authors abreast of the times and in touch with one another and with the world. But in this alliance of authors with the world, in this exchange of solitude for society, of the study for the drawing-room, there were dangers which threatened the very life of literature; for it was an attempt to serve two masters. Far from removing the petty faults of a literary life, it brought with it a host of new ones — flattery, the overestimation of the works of a clique, the attempt to direct public opinion by force, and above all, the cultivation of the graces at the expense of the imagination. There was actually a tendency towards the dangers of democracy — the surrender to majority, the descent to a common level — but without a saving reliance upon the elemental instincts of mankind.

[1] Thus Marmontel: 'Leurs entretiens étaient une école pour moi non moins utile qu'agréable et, autant qu'il m'était possible, je profitais de leurs leçons.'

The whole prophetic side of literature, the vision of the poet, the glory and the folly of the ideal, priest and lyrist, Wordsworth and Shelley, de Vigny and de Musset — these are all beyond the ken of salons. But they had their office. It was their function to teach the observation of life, to lend clearness and vivacity to style, and so to add a charm to learning, to win the ignorant and to elevate the frivolous by showing that dulness could be overcome with wit and pedantry with grace.

CHAPTER IV

English Authors in Parisian Salons

The English visitor was a familiar figure in the Parisian salon. In an age when travellers were studying manners rather than mountains, and preferred the society of philosophers to the finest galleries in Europe, no visit to Paris was complete without a conversation with good Madame Geoffrin or an hour with the 'blind sibyl,' du Deffand of the bitter tongue. A stream of Englishmen from Prior to Gibbon poured through their drawing-rooms [1] and listened with interest or with alarm to the *philosophes* who were, to use Walpole's words,[2] busily pulling down God and the King. Sometimes a returning traveller proved his acquaintance with this society by sacrificing his veracity. Thus Goldsmith asserted [3] that he was present 'in a select company of wits of both sexes at

[1] English visitors in Paris are satirized in two comedies by Samuel Foote, *The Englishman in Paris* (1753) and *The Englishman returned from Paris* (1757). In the former the leading character, Buck, is offered an introduction to 'Madame de Rambouillet'; in the latter he comes home completely Frenchified.

[2] *Letters* 6. 332; 19 October 1765.

[3] *Memoirs of M. de Voltaire.* During Goldsmith's sojourn on the Continent, Diderot and Fontenelle were still visitors at Madame Geoffrin's.

Paris' when Diderot, Fontenelle, and Voltaire disputed about the merits of English taste and learning. The interview, it has been repeatedly shown, could hardly have taken place, inasmuch as during the months when Goldsmith must have been in Paris, Voltaire was never once there. But the very lie is eloquent, for it shows the kind of experience in Paris which English authors sought and prized.

The cosmopolitan tone was contributed to the salon by the eighteenth century. It begins with Madame de Tencin. This brilliant woman, somewhat promiscuous in all her tastes, expanded the influence of her drawing-room, and thereby that of later salons, by welcoming distinguished men without respect of nationality; nor were foreigners slow to improve the opportunity of meeting a woman who was no less renowned for her social prestige than for the picturesque iniquity of her past. Her salon was in truth the atonement which she offered the world for the sins of her youth.

She had begun her career by running away from the convent where she had taken the veil. She used her secularized charms to win lovers, and used her lovers to advance her brother in the Church. She became mistress of the Regent, who snubbed her because she wished to talk business when his mind ran on love. The royal harlot then sank into a cheap adventuress; she gave birth to a son, destined to become famous as d'Alembert, and 'exposed' him on the steps of Saint

Jean le Rond in the hope of making an end of him. At length when a maddened lover shot himself to death under her own roof, she was imprisoned in the Bastille, where she languished for some months. And then, after her release, as if to show that she had a head if not a heart, she abandoned her career of profligacy as lightly as she had formerly abandoned a lover or a child, and opened a drawing-room which, with the death of Madame de Lambert in 1733, became the most brilliant and influential in Paris. Here for twenty years she reigned over such retainers as Montesquieu and Fontenelle. Her success is easier to understand than her motives. Certain it is, however, as Professor Brunel has suggested,[1] that she attracted the men of letters because she gave them to understand that their respect was the one thing in the world for which she cared.

Madame de Tencin had become intimate with Englishmen even before the days of her fame. She was that 'eloped nun who has supplanted the nut-brown maid'[2] in the affections of Matthew Prior, during his diplomatic service in Paris in the winter

[1] In Petit de Julleville's *Histoire de la Littérature Française, op. cit.*, 6. 404, Walpole, who must have had her character from Madame du Deffand, tells Mason that she was 'a most horrid woman' who 'had great parts and so little principle that she was supposed to have murdered and robbed one of her lovers, a scrape out of which Lord Harrington and another of them saved her. She had levees from eight in the morning till night, from the lowest tools to the highest.' *Letters* 10. 28; 13 March 1777.

[2] *Works* of Bolingbroke 7. 169; letter to Hanmer, December 1712 (?).

of 1712–13. She used him to bring the needs of her brother (whom Prior did not consider to be 'worth hanging'[1]) before Lord Bolingbroke. He himself was presently avowing her his Queen, and himself her faithful and devoted subject '*dans tous ses états.*'[2] Leslie Stephen[3] considers that Bolingbroke made use of Madame de Tencin in his intrigues with the Regent; but however this may be, his intrigues with the Regent's mistress became common gossip, and were published abroad by the ballad-singer in the streets.[4]

But Bolingbroke was not the only English peer who paid court to the '*nonne défroquée.*' Lord Chesterfield was introduced to her by Montesquieu, and, in 1741, passed some time in her salon, during its later glory. Here he enjoyed the society of authors whom he was always pleased to regard as superior to those of his own country and whose works, particularly Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois*, Fontenelle's *Pluralité des Mondes*, and the productions of Crébillon and Marivaux, he never tired of recommending to his son. Fontenelle, the placid death's-head who had never laughed and who could lead a minuet at the age of ninety-seven, must have seemed to Chesterfield the

[1] *Ib.*, 7. 87; 17 October 1712. Prior to Bolingbroke.

[2] *Lettres Historiques de Bolingbroke* (Paris 1808), 2. 431; 3 June 1715.

[3] *Dictionary of National Biography*, 'Saint John.'

[4] See the ribald verses commencing, 'Tencin, vous avez de l'esprit,' printed in *Lettres de Bolingbroke, op. cit.*, 2. 433 *n.* The second stanza begins, 'Bolingbroke, es-tu possédé?'

pattern of a man. And yet he could assert, a few years later, that Fontenelle had sacrificed somewhat too much to the Graces.[1]

But what did he think of Madame? What did the great exemplar of the *bel air*, himself a patron of letters, think of the life and aims of the salon? It is not easy to say. He flattered Madame de Tencin outrageously, according to his professed theories; he praised the good taste of Frenchmen (of which Madame was at once 'le soutien et l'ornement'), and denounced the brusqueness of his countrymen according to his wont. He boasted himself[2] the 'ami, favori, et enfant de la maison' of Madame de Tencin. But when he had occasion to describe the literary life of Paris to his son, he declared that the salons were filled with gossips who talked nonsense and *philosophes* whose works were metaphysical fustian, *verba et voces et praeterea nihil*.[3] It was an institution which young Stanhope must visit, where he was to talk epigrams, false sentiments, and philosophical nonsense, but to which he was to maintain a large superiority. Yet, in spite of this show of indifference, I cannot but feel that Chesterfield liked the salon. What else in heaven or earth was there for such a man to like? What could have been more to his taste than its courtly union of intrigue and

[1] *Letters*, edited by Bradshaw, 1. 383; 24 December 1750.

[2] See his letter to Madame de Tencin, introducing Mrs. Cleland, in *Letters*, as above, 2. 771; 20 August 1742.

[3] *Letters, op. cit.*, 1. 383.

elegance, of literature and wit, of free thought and easy morals? The salon certainly liked Chesterfield. 'Let him come back to us,' cried Montesquieu and the rest of them when Madame de Tencin had read his letter to the circle, and read it more than once. 'He writes French better than we do,' exclaimed Fontenelle, 'qu'il se contente, s'il lui plaît, d'être le premier homme de sa nation, d'avoir les lumières et la profondeur de génie qui la caractérisent; et qu'il ne vienne point encore s'emparer de nos grâces et de nos gentillesses.' [1] When Madame de Tencin despatched this mass of flattery to Chesterfield, Fontenelle added a note begging the English lord not to draw down upon himself too much French jealousy.[2] Unless Chesterfield was, like Fontenelle, incapable of all human emotions, he was pleased by that. The Frenchmen had studied him well. They touched his vulnerable point, and posterity will not easily be persuaded that it was in vain.

'In future, then,' said Fontenelle, after the death of Madame de Tencin, 'I shall go to Madame Geoffrin's.' The change must have supplied the aged wit with many observations on the diversity of the female

[1] See Professor P. M. Masson's excellent monograph, *Madame de Tencin* (Paris 1909), pp. 278–80. The appendix contains Madame de Tencin's letters.

[2] Cf. Montesquieu, *Lettres;* 12 March 1750 (in *Œuvres*, Paris 1879): 'Dîtes à milord Chesterfield que rien ne me flatte tant que son approbation,' and the rest.

character; for though 'la Geoffrin' had studied the methods of her predecessor, there was no resemblance in character between the two. There is no suggestion of Madame de Tencin's subtlety in the amiable bourgeoise who became a queen of society at fifty, but rather a rich simplicity of nature that is very winning. Her faults as well as her virtues are quite obvious. Her humour is for ever expressing itself in homely maxims[1] which suggest the lore of peasants. She made her way by the simplest means, a warm heart, abiding common sense, and a persistent will. Her keen intelligence, the gift of nature, not of books, enabled her to understand the philosophers at least as well as they understood themselves, to advise — almost lead — them, to be their 'Mother,' and to push them into the Academy. It is, at first blush, amazing that a woman without education, who, indeed, found grammar a mystery, could thus have become the empress of the wits. But living as she did in an 'age of reason' when the imagination was turning back to contemplate man in a 'state of nature,' unspoiled by the arts of a luxurious civilization, such a defect was not fatal. Shrewd, placid yet alert, simple and with

[1] Madame Necker, who had studied Madame Geoffrin's methods, remarks (*Nouveaux Mélanges* 1. 100): 'Le piquant de l'esprit de Madame Geoffrin consistait toujours à rendre des idées ingénieuses par des images triviales, et pour ainsi dire, de ménage; son esprit était toujours enté sur un ton bourgeois.' The following may serve as specimens (cf. above, p. 29): 'Madame —— a frappé à la porte de toutes les vertus sans entrer chez aucune.' 'Quand nos amis sont borgnes, il faut les regarder de profil.'

the sweep of vision that is given only to the simple, she looked out fearlessly upon the society of her time, with all its elaborate systems and new philosophies — and understood. As she was without fear, so she was without contempt. She saw what was good in the new order and encouraged it, but without becoming its slave. Like Johnson (whom she would have understood), she contrived to 'worship in the age of Voltaire,' but this was with no surrender of her interest in Voltaire. She was intolerant of pretence. She adopted a manner of treating her friends which, in its combination of brusqueness and affection, is thoroughly parental. She scolds and pushes, punishes and rewards. She decides disputes with a word. She spends with open hand. Her great desire is to be of help to her children. D'Alembert writes[1] of her, '"Vous croyez," disait elle à un des hommes qu'elle aimait le plus, "que c'est pour moi que je vois des grands et des ministres? Détrompez-vous; je les vois pour vous et pour vos semblables, qui pouvez en avoir besoin: si tous ceux que j'aime étaient heureux et sages, ma porte serait tous les jours fermée a neuf heures, excepté pour eux."' But she never forgot that, in her own house, she alone was mistress. Her charity, which she conducted on a heroic scale, implied a certain obedience in the recipients of it; but both charity and obedience were only devices for promoting their interests. 'Elle ne respirait que pour faire le bien,' said

[1] Letter in *Éloges de Madame Geoffrin*, ed. M. Morellet, p. 110.

d'Alembert.[1] He and the other writers for the Cyclopædia profited by her charity, for without her patronage that great work could hardly have been carried to publication.

In the salon of Madame Geoffrin and her free-thinking friends, David Hume found, in 1763, a natural abiding-place. It had, indeed, a dual attraction for him in the person of its hostess and the character of her coterie. Madame Geoffrin must have found the Scotch philosopher a man after her own heart. She understood the broad-featured, simple man, whom she presently took to calling[2] her 'coquin,' her 'gros drôle.' Like her, he enjoyed the society of rationalists. He writes naïvely in his *Autobiography:* 'Those who have not seen the strange effects of modes, will never imagine the strange reception I met with at Paris, from men and women of all ranks and stations. The more I resiled from their excessive civilities, the more I was loaded with them. There is, however, a real satisfaction in living at Paris from the great number of sensible, knowing, and polite company with which the city abounds above all places in the universe. I thought once of settling there for life.' But he kept his head under the pelting flattery. He neither despised his social success nor exalted it as the *summum bonum.* Like Madame Geoffrin, he made no apologies for himself, and pretended to no social graces which he could not easily acquire. His French was

[1] *Éloges, op. cit.*, p. 105.

[2] *Letters to Hume*, pp. 288–89.

wretched. Walpole protested [1] that it was 'almost as unintelligible as his English.' He had no *bons mots*. He did not even talk much. Grimm found [2] him heavy, and Madame du Deffand dubbed him 'the peasant.' [3]

But to more serious souls he was even as the Spirit of the Age. He had voiced the new scepticism. He had given the death-blow to miracles. Before his coming to Paris, all his better-known work had been done, and the fame of it preceded him. Alexander Street wrote from Paris to Sir William Johnstone, on December 16, 1762: 'When you have occasion to see our friend, David Hume, tell him that he is so much worshipped here that he must be void of all passions, if he does not immediately take post for Paris. In most houses where I am acquainted here, one of the first questions is, "Do you know M. Hume whom we all admire so much?" I dined yesterday at Helvétius's, where this same M. Hume interrupted our conversation very much.' [4]

His influence was, in truth, greater in France than in England; for the temper of English literature never became openly rationalistic. Deism itself was living a subterranean existence; for the authority of such powerful men as Johnson and Burke ran directly

[1] *Letters* 6. 298; 20 September 1765.

[2] *Correspondance Littéraire*, Paris 1829, 5. 4: 'Il est lourd, il n'a ni chaleur, ni grâce, ni agrément dans l'esprit.'

[3] *Lettres à Walpole* 1, *passim*.

[4] Burton's *Life of Hume* 2. 168 *n*.

counter to it. But in France all sails were set, and men's faces turned towards 'unpath'd waters, undreamed shores.' To the 'free' thought that was becoming ever freer and now drifting towards all manner of negation, Hume came as a high priest, an acknowledged pontiff. He was the man whom the King delighted to honour, whose praises were lisped by the King's children, who was approved by Voltaire, petted by all the women and revered by all the men. In less than two years, Walpole finds him [1] 'the mode,' 'fashion itself'; he is 'treated with perfect veneration,' and his works held to be the 'standards of writing.' Hume himself writes to Fergusson [2] that he overheard an elderly gentleman, 'esteemed one of the cleverest and most sensible' of men, boasting that he had caught sight of Hume that day at court.[3] At last they pay him the compliment (Madame Geoffrin leading off, no doubt) of 'bantering' him and telling droll stories of him. He begins to fear that the great ladies are taking him too much from the society of d'Alembert, Buffon, Marmontel, Diderot, and the rest.[4]

Among the distinguished women in Paris who wooed him were Mlle. de Lespinasse, Madame du Bocage,

[1] *Letters* 6, *passim*. Cf. Grimm, *op. cit.*, 5. 3–4.

[2] Burton's *Hume* 2. 173; 9 November 1673.

[3] An Englishman in Paris wrote to the Earl Marshall of Scotland, 'L'on regarde le bonheur de l'y voir comme un des plus doux fruits de la paix.' *Letters to Hume*, p. 63; 4 January 1764.

[4] Burton's *Hume* 2. 181.

who sent him her works, and the Marquise de Boufflers, who made no secret of her fondness for the British. This lady once cherished a '*petite flamme*'[1] for Beauclerk, Johnson's gay friend, and even crossed the path of the Lexicographer himself; for it was she whom Johnson, like a squire of dames, gallantly escorted to her coach, and afterwards honoured with a letter. The sentimental homage which she paid to Hume incurred the contempt of Madame du Deffand, who sneered at her worship of false gods, and made her miserable by leading others to denounce her idol.[2]

Madame de Boufflers played a prominent part in the great quarrel between Hume and Rousseau, which involved many of the most prominent persons mentioned in this chapter. The story, which has been frequently told, may be briefly dismissed.[3] The union by which the sentimentalist gave himself in charge to the rationalist, might well have furnished a Hogarth with a subject for an allegorical group representing Scotch solidity and Gallic perversity. Hume, through Madame de Boufflers, had assured Rousseau that he could find in England appreciation, friends, and a true

[1] Du Deffand's *Lettres à Walpole* 3. 591.

[2] *Lettres à Walpole* 1. 232; 5 March 1767, *et passim.*

[3] See Burton's *Life of Hume; Letters addressed to Hume* (1849); *Private Correspondence of Hume* (1820); *Letters*, ed. T. Murray (1841); and *Exposé succinct de la Contestation . . . entre M. Hume et M. Rousseau* (1766). The simplest narratives for the general reader are in Ségur's *Julie de Lespinasse*, chapter 7, and in Collins's *Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau in England*, pp. 182 ff.

home; and the ill-assorted pair accordingly departed from Paris early in 1776. It was not long before wild letters reached the salons.[1] The two philosophers were hurling epithets at each other, *scélérat! traître!*

The most immediate cause of their rupture was a letter, written by Walpole, to amuse Madame Geoffrin's coterie. It purported to be by the King of Prussia, and invited Rousseau to come to court and enjoy his fill of persecution. A brief extract will show the character of this sprightly epistle:

> Si vous persistez à vous creuser l'esprit pour trouver de nouveaux malheurs, choisissez-les tels que vous voudrez. Je suis roi, je puis vous en procurer augré de vos souhaits: et ce qui sûrement ne vous arrivera pas vis-à-vis de vos ennemis, je cesserai de vous persécuter quand vous cesserez de mettre votre gloire à l'être.[2]

This letter, which had been touched up by Helvétius and the Duc de Nivernois, circulated in the salons, and at last found its way to England, where it was printed by various newspapers in April 1766. The quarrel between Rousseau and Hume, which had been threatening for some weeks, now burst in fury; for Rousseau believed that Hume was in league with Walpole to disgrace him.

[1] See Garat, *Mémoires Historiques* 2. 158.

[2] See *Letters* 6. 396; 12 January 1766, for the complete letter. A second letter, in the character of Émile, is printed in Madame du Deffand's *Lettres à Walpole* 1. 3 *n.* Madame du Deffand persuaded Walpole not to let it become public.

Every one now plunged into controversy and correspondence. Mlle. de Lespinasse attempts to soothe feelings. D'Alembert outlines Hume's campaign. Baron d'Holbach condoles. Walpole explains. Madame de Boufflers fears for the renown of philosophy. Madame du Deffand, who hated everybody concerned, except Walpole, and whom d'Alembert accused of having stirred up all the trouble, finally did as much as any one to put an end to it.[1] Nothing having been accomplished, and the vanity of all having been fully displayed, the matter subsided, leaving a general conviction in the mind of each that all the others had conducted themselves very foolishly.

Hume never returned to the salons, though Mlle. de Lespinasse implored and Madame de Boufflers protested. It was to the latter that he wrote the tranquil letter from his death-bed 'without any anxiety or regret'[2] which elicited the admiration even of Madame du Deffand[3] and delighted the salons by showing that their favourite could die like a philosopher.[4]

Hume's acceptance of the salon and its ideals is in

[1] See above, p. 54 *n.*, and volume one of her *Lettres à Walpole, passim.*

[2] Burton's *Life of Hume* 2. 513.

[3] *Lettres à Walpole* 3. 253.

[4] In October (?) 1776, Mrs. Montagu wrote to Beattie: 'As I passed a good deal of my time with the Litterati at Paris, you may imagine I heard much of the manner of Mr. Hume's taking leave of the world. "Les Philosophes" (as they call themselves) were pleased that he supported the infidel character with so much constancy.' M. Forbes's *Beattie and his Friends* 130.

striking contrast to the fussy dissatisfaction of Horace Walpole. 'I was expressing my aversion,' he writes, 'to disputes: Mr. Hume, who very gratefully admires the tone of Paris, having never known any other tone, said with great surprise, "Why, what do you like if you hate both disputes and whisk?"' Walpole's reply is not recorded. Certainly he did not like *les philosophes* and their conversation which he found 'solemn, pedantic, and seldom animated but by a dispute.' [1] He hated authors by profession. He hated political talk (having practical knowledge and experience of politics). He hated *savants*, free thinkers, and *beaux esprits*, with their eternal dissertations on religion and government.[2] 'I have never yet,' he wrote [3] to Montagu, 'seen or heard anything serious that was not ridiculous. Jesuits, Methodists, philosophers, politicians, the hypocrite Rousseau, the scoffer Voltaire, the encyclopedistes, the Humes, the Lytteltons, the Grenvilles, the atheist tyrant of Russia, and the mountebank of history Mr. Pitt, all are to me but impostors in their various ways.' He is 'sick of visions and systems that shove one another aside and come over again like the figures in a moving picture.' Yet like all scoffers, he has nothing to set up in the place of all this. He could not give his heart to the new system, but he was equally incapable of being loyal to the old.

[1] *Letters* 6. 309; 3 October 1765.
[2] *Ib.*, 6. 332.
[3] *Ib.*, 6. 358.

Dissatisfied with both, he laughed at both, and was nettled because he could find none in Paris to laugh with him. Laughing was not fashionable in the salons.[1] He despised the prevalent devotion to cards. He was scornfully amused at the popularity of the English in Paris — and even at his own popularity. 'Vous n'observez,' said Madame du Deffand, 'que pour vous moquer; vous ne tenez à rien, vous vous passez de tout; enfin, enfin, rien ne vous est nécessaire.'[2] But there was one thing necessary to Walpole, and it was the thing he professed to despise — the salon. Without knowing the salons he could not ridicule them. No satirist can be a hermit. So Walpole frequented the salons, and vastly enjoyed, not the salons themselves, but his own superiority to them. It was at Madame Geoffrin's that his career began. He brought a note of introduction from Lady Hervey, met Madame Geoffrin, and discovered to his surprise — and the reader's — that he liked her. She had sense, 'more common sense than he almost ever met with.'[3] He notes her quickness in penetrating character, her protection of artists, her services to them, and her 'thousand little arts and offices of friendship,' of which

[1] See *Letters* 6. 332: 'Good folks, they have no time to laugh.' 'M. de Fontenelle,' asked Madame Geoffrin one day, 'Vous n'avez jamais ri?' 'Non,' he replied, 'je n'ai jamais fait ah, ah, ah.' Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges* 1. 165. Chesterfield's hatred of laughter, that 'shocking distortion of the face,' is well-known; he boasted that he had never been seen to laugh.

[2] *Lettres à Walpole* 1. 577; 24 May 1769.

[3] *Letters* 6. 404; 25 January 1766.

latter she was presently to give him a specimen. When he had an attack of gout, she took him under her care. On October 13, 1765, he writes of her to Lady Hervey:

> Madame Geoffrin came and sat two hours last night by my bedside:[1] I could have sworn it had been my lady Hervey, she was so good to me. It was with so much sense, information, instruction, and correction! The manner of the latter charms me. I never saw anybody in my days that catches one's faults and vanities and impositions so quick, that explains them to one so clearly, and convinces one so easily. I never liked to be set right before! You cannot imagine how I taste it! I make her both my confessor and director, and begin to think I shall be a reasonable creature at last, which I had never intended to be. The next time I see her, I believe I shall say, 'Oh! Common Sense,[2] sit down: I have been thinking so and so; is it not absurd?' — for t'other sense and wisdom, I never liked them; I shall now hate them for her sake. If it was worth her while, I assure your Ladyship she might govern me like a child.

The attention which he received was not without its effect, and at last he was obliged to admit himself pleased.[3] He does not know when he will return to England; and he dwells with delight on the honours and distinctions he receives.

He became one of the most prominent men in Parisian society, and for a time eclipsed the reputation of Hume

[1] Ten years later Madame du Deffand gave him a more startling illustration of French motherliness. See *Letters* 9. 236.

[2] Cf. Professor Brunel in Petit de Julleville's *Histoire* 6. 410: 'C'est en effet la "raison" qu'on reconnaît à Madame Geoffrin pour mérite éminent.'

[3] *Letters* 6. 395; 11 January 1766.

himself. The latter had been worshipped as a philosopher; Walpole reigned as a wit. The letter to Rousseau, which has been described above, captivated the salons, and probably even made them laugh. The *jeu d'esprit*, which had first occurred to him at Madame Geoffrin's, so pleased him that he cast it into more elaborate form, displayed the forged letter in the salons, and became famous at once. 'The copies,' he writes to Conway, 'have spread like wildfire; *et me voici à la mode*.'[1] It was long before Walpole heard the last of his jest; for, as we have seen, it involved him in the controversy between Hume and Rousseau, and Walpole hated controversy as much as he loved wit. But for the moment it served to draw the eyes of the French world upon him.

Meanwhile, he had become intimate with Madame Geoffrin's great rival, the blind Madame du Deffand, now in her sixty-ninth year, who rapidly displaced Madame Geoffrin in his affections. By December 1765, he was supping with her twice a week, and in January he wrote Gray his famous description of her:[2]

> Madame du Deffand was for a short time mistress of the Regent, is now very old and stone-blind, but retains all her vivacity, wit, memory, judgement, passions, and agreeableness. She goes to operas, plays, suppers, and Versailles; gives suppers twice a week; has everything new read to her; makes new songs and epigrams, ay, admirably, and remembers every one

[1] *Ib.*, 6. 396.

[2] *Ib.*, 6. 404; 25 January 1766.

that has been made these fourscore years. She corresponds with Voltaire, dictates charming letters to him, contradicts him, is no bigot to him or anybody, and laughs both at the clergy and the philosophers. In a dispute, into which she easily falls, she is very warm, and yet scarce ever in the wrong: her judgement on every subject is as just as possible; on every point of conduct as wrong as possible: for she is all love and hatred, passionate for her friends to enthusiasm, still anxious to be loved, I don't mean by lovers, and a vehement enemy, but openly. As she can have no amusement but conversation, the least solitude and *ennui* are insupportable to her, and put her into the power of several worthless people, who eat her suppers when they can eat nobody's of higher rank; wink to one another, and laugh at her; hate her because she has forty times more parts — and venture to hate her because she is not rich.[1]

It was natural that Walpole should prefer her society to Madame Geoffrin's. Being Horace Walpole, it was inevitable that he should come to regard Madame Geoffrin's coterie with disdain, to complain that it was made up of 'pretended *beaux esprits*' and *faux savants*, and that they were 'very impertinent and dogmatic.'[2] Madame herself had offended him by calling him[3] 'the new Richelieu' in reference to his numerous conquests. Walpole grew suddenly afraid of the Geoffrin's intimacy, and feared that he was becoming an object of ridicule. But in Madame du Deffand

[1] Montesquieu wrote her (15 June 1751): 'Je sens qu'il n'y a pas de lectures qui puissent remplacer un quart d'heure de ces soupers qui faisaient mes délices.' *Œuvres* (1879), 7. 377.

[2] *Letters* 9. 59; 28 September 1774.

[3] *Ib.*, 6. 356; Walpole had met this Duke in Paris.

he found one of his own sort, a woman used to the society of the great but with no illusions about it, a woman who ruled her circle by despising almost every one who came into it, who had no faith in any one, and least of all in the authors and diplomats who surrounded her, and whose society she endured only because she found it less intolerable than her dark solitude.

In a beautiful letter to her on her blindness, which had become total about a dozen years before the period when we encounter her, Montesquieu reminded [1] her that they were both 'small rebel spirits condemned to darkness.' There is in truth something suggestive of the powers of darkness in Madame du Deffand's pride and perversity. She was of a will never to submit or yield. Pride in the reputation she had made, a passionate delight in conversation, and, above all, the horror of her lonely hours of introspection determined her to continue her salon in spite of all. She did not fail. But a blow hardly less grievous had yet to fall. Mlle. de Lespinasse, on whose assistance she had leaned, had caught the secret of her success, and was forming a coterie of her own, an inner circle within Madame du Deffand's. When the blind woman learned of her assistant's treachery, she broke with her, and Mlle. de Lespinasse departed, carrying with her d'Alembert, adored of Madame du Deffand, and his friends, the flower of the flock.

[1] Montesquieu, *Œuvres* (1879), 7. 400; 13 September 1752. 'Ce qui doît nous consoler, c'est que ceux qui voient clair ne sont pour celà lumineux.'

Even then the dauntless old woman would not give up. The aged sibyl in her 'tonneau' [1] at the Convent Saint Joseph could still attract the curious and the clever. Blind as she was, her 'portraits' of character were better than Madame Geoffrin's, — who excelled in portraits, — and the clarity of her vision was surpassed only by the crispness of her phrasing. At sixty-eight, she had an eager curiosity about her own times [2] that was a stimulus to youth. To speak with her was to witness the triumph of mind.

But her heart was as dust and ashes within her. About her she could feel only duplicity and hatred; [3] she had no faith in man or in God. She considered her friends as those who would not kill but would look on while others killed.[4] The springs of happiness and hope had gone dry. And always the spectre of

[1] This description of herself 'dans le coin d'un couvent' she sent to Madame de Boufflers:

Dans son tonneau
On voit une vieille sibylle
Dans son tonneau.
Qui n'a sur les os que la peau,
Qui jamais ne jeûna Vigile,
Qui rarement lit l'Évangile
Dans son tonneau.

— From G. Maugras, *La Marquise de Boufflers*, p. 101.

[2] 'Madame du Deffand . . . is delicious; that is, as often as I can get her fifty years back, but she is as eager about what happens every day as I am about the last century.' Walpole, *Letters* 6. 367; 2 December 1765.

[3] D'Alembert called her 'The Viper,' and told Hume that she hated everybody, especially great men. *Letters to Hume*, p. 201.

[4] 'Ceux par qui on n'a pas craindre d'être assassiné, mais qui laisseraient faire les assassins.' Montesquieu, *Œuvres* (1879) 7. 379.

Ennui steals behind her, and casts its shadow over her withered soul. Literature no longer interests or amuses; she finds philosophy poisoned by affectation;[1] she is bored by all historians, and is glad when she can lay down the first volume of Gibbon.[2] She hears Gluck's *Orphée*, and is bored. She hears *The Barber of Seville*, and is bored.[3] She reads the *Iliad*, and is bored.[4] There is nothing in her life that does not feel this blight.

And then, in the late evening of her days, a miracle occurred. The dry branch budded and bloomed. In the person of Walpole, with his chill though delicate cynicism (so like her own), romance burst into her life, and she knew love and the pain of love. Her passion for the Englishman twenty years her junior transcends all comparison. It has in it the tenderness of age without its resignation, and the insistence of youth without its joy. It wreaks itself in protestations, reproaches, and demands which it knows must be futile. In Madame du Deffand's letters to Walpole, recently published in their entirety,[5] there is a strong undercurrent which moves relentlessly to tragedy — tragedy that is no less poignant because its protagonist is an old woman and its theme the progress of a slow despair.

To Walpole all this was a source of great uneasiness.

[1] Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges* 1. 79: 'Madame du Défan [sic] accusait tous les penseurs d'affectation.'

[2] *Lettres à Walpole* 3. 319, *et passim*.

[3] *Ib.* 3. 77.

[4] *Ib.* 2. 373; cf. 3. 203. 'Toute espèce de lecture m'ennuie.'

[5] Edited by Mrs. Paget Toynbee, London, 1912. There are 838 letters.

Like most superior folk, he feared the world. He feared that letters might be intercepted, that Madame du Deffand might talk; that the story might become public; that he might become an object of ridicule — and ridicule was to him a hell. He urged upon Madame du Deffand the necessity of reticence. He was crushingly persistent. The aged woman did her best to smother her feelings, but she could not altogether smother her resentment:

J'ai une véritable amitié pour vous, vous le savez, et quoique vous vous en soyez souvent trouvé importuné, que vous ayez fait tout votre possible et même tout ce qui est *inimaginable* pour détruire cette amitié, je suis persuadée que vous n'êtes point fâché qu'elle subsiste. . . . Et comment est-il possible qu'un aussi bon homme que vous veuille tourmenter une si faible créature que moi, de qui vous ne pouvez jamais craindre aucun mal, ni qui puisse vous faire encourir aucun ridicule ni aucun blâme? [1]

Walpole's letters to Madame du Deffand are fortunately not preserved; but one imagines that he was bored by this strain. To him Madame du Deffand was an aristocratic French woman, a match for him in wit, frankness, and cynicism, who could provide him with that social life which, like her, he affected to despise but could not abandon. He had admired her capacity for disillusion, and now she was the victim of an illusion, and he was the object of it. The situation was unusual.

[1] *Lettres à Walpole* 1. 167; 14 November 1766.

But though Walpole could not respond, he did not break with her, or care to break. When, in 1775, he visited her, for the third time, she showered him with so many engagements that he needed 'the activity of a squirrel and the strength of a Hercules' to go through with them.[1] He was pleased. He asserted that Madame du Deffand was a star in the East well worth coming to adore.[2] With a literary friendship that displayed itself in salons, in dedications of books, and in temperate letters, he could be well content. At her death he wrote of her with true affection, gratitude, and grief. But she had longed in vain for the expression of these, and of more than these, during the desolation of her latter months.

The effect upon Walpole of this acquaintance with Madame du Deffand and her salon was to fix in him certain characteristics not always attractive. She had been able to show him the salon in the one aspect which could appeal to him; where persiflage had not yielded to the pedantry of the new philosophy. In his association with her and with the group whose inspiration she was, he acquired that amused tolerance

[1] *Letters* 9. 249; 8 September 1775.

[2] 'If possible she is more worth visiting than ever; and so far am I from being ashamed of coming hither at my age, that I look on myself as wiser than one of the Magi, when I travel to adore this star in the East. The star and I went to the Opera last night, and when we came from Madame de la Vallière's, at one in the morning, it wanted to drive about the town, because it was too early to *set*. . . . You nurse a little girl of four years old, and I rake with an old woman of fourscore!' *Letters* 9. 256; to Selwyn, 16 September 1775.

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with which he viewed the attempts of the bluestockings in England to rival the salons which he had known in France.

Among Madame du Deffand's visitors was the man to whom she referred as 'the famous Mr. Burke.' His visit to Paris was of less than a month's duration. Madame du Deffand met him on February 9, 1773;[1] and he left France, apparently on the first day of March.[2] Burke had not come to Paris to enjoy the fruits of his fame — though his reputation in the salons as the author of the Junius letters[3] would have given him a career — or to study the philosophical and political principles of the day. He had placed his son Richard at Auxerre to learn French; but before returning to England he glanced at the French court and at the salons. His attitude towards the latter was unique. 'It was,' says Morley,[4] 'almost as though the solemn hierophant of some mystic Egyptian temple should have found himself amid the brilliant chatter of a band of reckless, keen-tongued disputants of the garden or the porch at Athens.' Yet any seriousness of manner which he may have displayed exalted him in the eyes of the philosophers. Madame du Deffand, though she afterwards learned to despise his writing

[1] *Lettres à Walpole* 2. 476.

[2] *Ib.* 2. 484.

[3] *Ib.* 2. 479; 'Il y a des gens ici qui l'appellent *Junius*.'

[4] J. Morley, *Burke*, p. 67.

as verbose, diffuse, obscure, and affected,[1] liked him at once. 'Il me paraît avoir infiniment d'esprit,' she writes,[2] and again, 'Il est très aimable.' She gave a supper for him, and exerted herself to assemble the most distinguished and clever members of her circle.[3] She had him invited to Madame de Luxembourg's, where he heard La Harpe read a new tragedy in verse, *Les Barmécides*.[4] He also talked with Madame du Deffand of a new book, *Essai Générale de Tactique*[5] by the Count de Guibert, dealing with the state of politics and military science in Europe. This elaborate and enthusiastic treatise, which contained an attack on idle sovereigns and corrupt courts, appealed to Burke; and, at Madame du Deffand's request, he carried a copy of it to Walpole. Burke knew the same author's tragedy, *Le Connétable de Bourbon*,[6] a fact worth mention as indicating an acquaintance with the salon of Mlle. de Lespinasse, whose lover the author was. Burke must have heard Guibert read this

[1] *Lettres à Walpole* 3. 589, in criticism of his *Speech on the Independence of Parliament*, 11 February 1780.

[2] *Ib.* 2. 479; 481.

[3] 'Je lui donne une compagnie que j'ai tâché de lui assortir; un M. du Buc, qui est aussi un grand esprit, le Comte de Broglio, l'Évêque de Mirepoix, Madame de Cambis, les Caraman, etc.' *Lettres à Walpole* 2. 479; 24 February 1773.

[4] Printed in 1778.

[5] By J. A. H. de Guibert, Paris 1773.

[6] See *Lettres à Walpole* 2. 488. He had spoken of it to Walpole, and evidently preferred it to La Harpe's tragedy — which did not please Madame du Deffand. The tragedy, which was widely known from the author's reading of it in the salons, was acted in 1775.

play aloud, for it had not yet been acted or published, and the reading may well have occurred at Mlle. de Lespinasse's. Again, it may have been in that salon that Burke attacked the philosophy of Hume,[1] and defended Beattie against the sneers of the free thinkers — a course that must have taxed his abundant ingenuity as much as his defective French.

It would be interesting to know the conversation that passed between Burke and Walpole after the former's return to England. They met, and it would seem that Burke expressed strong opinions on the growing atheism of France, and told of his attempt to defend the Christian system, for Walpole wrote[2] to the Countess of Upper Ossory: 'Mr. Burke is returned from Paris, where he was so much the mode that, happening to dispute with the philosophers, it grew the fashion to be Christians. St. Patrick himself did not make more converts.' But whatever effect Burke may have had upon the freethinkers of Paris, there can be no doubt of their effect upon him. The amazing downrush of principles, religious, philosophical, and political, which he witnessed in France confirmed him in that natural conservatism, that desire 'never wholly or at once to depart from antiquity' to which he was becoming more and more passionately devoted as the great French crisis drew on.

[1] See Bisset, *Life of Burke* (1798), p. 158. Morley thinks it was in Mlle. de Lespinasse's salon that Burke met Diderot.

[2] *Letters* 8. 252; 11 March 1773.

The spectacle of Burke converting the philosophers to Christianity sinks into pale insignificance beside Yorick Sterne's conversion of Madame de Vence from the perils of deism — an incident familiar to every reader of *The Sentimental Journey*. It was in the winter of 1762 that Sterne made his entry into the salons, and discovered those guiding principles of compliment, flattery, and general philandering, which enabled him to win all the *esprits*, and, incidentally, to put an end to the deism of Madame de Vence. Seated on a sofa beside the lady, whose waning beauty should have made her a deist five years before, he revealed the dangers to which beauty, particularly in deists, was exposed, and dwelt on the defense provided by religious sentiments. '"We are not adamant," said I, taking hold of her hand — "and there is need of all restraints, till age in her own time steals in and lays them on us — but, my dear lady," said I, kissing her hand — "'tis too — too soon ——" I declare I had the credit all over Paris of unperverting Madame de V——. She affirmed to Mons. D——[1] and the Abbe M——[2] that in one half-hour I had said more for revealed religion than all their Encyclopedia had said against it — I was lifted directly into Madame de V——'s *Coterie* — and she put off the epocha of deism for two years.'

Yorick learned, too, the importance of self-obliteration. 'I had been misrepresented to Madame de

[1] Diderot. [2] Morellet.

Q—— as an *esprit* — Madame de Q—— was an *esprit* herself: she burnt with impatience to see me, and hear me talk. I had not taken my seat before I saw she did not care a sous whether I had any wit or no — I was let in, to be convinced she had. — I call heaven to witness I never once opened the door of my lips.'

Such anecdotes may not give us facts,[1] but they record something quite as useful, Sterne's impression of the salon, and are a reliable indication of his general conduct there. The wits of Paris found the most perfect resemblance between Sterne and his books. Garat asserts [2] that between seeing the author and reading his works there was almost no difference at all. There are peculiarly Shandian touches in some of his letters to Garrick, as his mention [3] of the Baron d'Holbach, 'one of the most learned men over here, the great protector of wits and the Sçavans who are no wits.' Baron d'Holbach was the 'maître d'hôtel' of philosophy, friend of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot, with a salon of his own, in which he presided over a school of physicists who held a new theory of nature. Four years later Walpole [4] eschewed this 'pigeon-house' of *savants* and their system of antediluvian deluges invented to prove the eternity of matter.

[1] Professor Cross, however, considers them fairly reliable. *Life of Sterne*, p. 287.

[2] D. Garat, *Mémoires Historiques sur le XVIII^e Siècle* 2. 136.

[3] 31 January 1762.

[4] *Letters* 6. 370; 2 December 1765.

Sterne, who was more affable than Walpole, though no less sharp-sighted, enjoyed himself there and became a friend of Diderot (to whom he presented a collection of English books).

It is probable that Sterne made a pretty complete tour of the salons, and there is good reason for assuming that at Madame Geoffrin's[1] he made the acquaintance of Mlle. de Lespinasse. This young woman, who was about to become one of the most brilliant hostesses in Paris,[2] was eagerly appreciative of the emotional aspect of Sterne's work. Compact of passion and nerves, a disciple of Rousseau, a 'daughter of the Sun,'[3] and a sort of female counterpart of Byron, she ate her heart out, was consumed with hopeless love for three men at once, and attempted suicide, quite in the familiar manner of a later school. To love and pain, to heaven and hell, she determined to devote herself.[4] Loathing the world where 'fools and automatons abound,' she must construct the world of romance for herself.

Shandyism won her by its frank display of emotion. There were aspects of it which she could never have

[1] Cf. Cross, *Life of Sterne*, p. 282.

[2] The rise of Julie de Lespinasse (1732–1776) to a position of first importance in Parisian society is a thrilling story. See Ségur, *Julie de Lespinasse*. The account of her break with Madame du Deffand whose 'companion' she had been, is referred to above, p. 61. Walpole (*Letters* 9. 59) calls her 'a pretended bel esprit,' and begs Conway not to allow himself to be taken to her salon, frequented by Englishmen, lest he offend Madame du Deffand.

[3] Necker, *Mélanges* 2. 287.

[4] *Letters* to the Count de Guibert (1809) 2. 233.

appreciated, its wayward humour and insincerity, its sprightliness and its dirt; but the tears and the tenderness she understood by instinct. The loves of Yorick and Eliza, never very popular in England, appealed to her as after the order of nature, and no doubt reminded her of her own relations with d'Alembert.

After the appearance of the *Sentimental Journey*, Mlle. de Lespinasse wrote two chapters[1] in imitation of that work which, though reproducing only such features of Sterne's manner as she understood, are of great importance as showing the influence of Sterne in the salons. In these the French sentimentalist has adopted the Englishman's manner in order to pay court to her benefactor, Madame Geoffrin. The chapters record two examples[2] of the elder woman's charity. The first of these, the incident of the broken vase, is attributed to Sterne himself. Yorick is represented as discovering that a vase which he has recently purchased has a broken lid. The workmen who have just delivered the treasure implore him to have mercy upon their fellow who broke it, whose accident has so alarmed him that he has not dared to appear.

[1] See *Lettres de Mlle. de Lespinasse . . . suivies de deux chapitres dans le genre du Voyage sentimental de Sterne, par le même Auteur.* Paris 1809; 3. 261.

[2] The authenticity of these stories is vouched for by the first editor of Mlle. de Lespinasse's *Letters* (1809), *op. cit.* 1. xiv, and by the author of the 'Portrait' in *Éloges de Madame Geoffrin* (1812), p. 47. Mlle. de Lespinasse read the chapters aloud in Madame Geoffrin's salon.

He is now fairly in the road to ruin. Pleased with the sympathetic distress of the brother artisans, Yorick inquires into the case, and is able, through La Fleur, to relieve the poor fellow's misery. He ministers to the needs of a wife and four children, and rewards the kindly friends with a generous *pourboire.*

The scene of the second chapter is Madame Geoffrin's salon. Here Sterne is represented as hearing that lady tell the story of her milkwoman. The pathetic death of a cow (sole prop of the milkwoman's family) recalls the incidents of the dead ass, and of Maria de Moulines and her goat in the *Sentimental Journey;* but there are serious deficiencies. Sterne, like Mlle. de Lespinasse, would have dwelt on the sentimental pleasure of presenting the milkwoman with two consolatory cows, but he would not have missed the humour in the fact that the cream afterwards delivered to Madame Geoffrin was not fit to drink. Mlle. de Lespinasse shows her appreciation of Sterne's sentimentalism and her ignorance of his Shandyism.

This imitation of Sterne seems to be the chief record in French of Yorick's impression on the salon. If it is a reliable view — and there seems to be no good reason for rejecting it — it is clear that Sterne preferred to appear in the drawing-room of Paris without his cap and bells. He realized perhaps that the way to win the hearts of French ladies was with his warm heart and his tearful eye, and not by the sudden caprice of his humour. It was Sterne the emotional

epicure, the professed philanderer, and not Yorick the jester, who was known to the salons; and in thus exploiting his sentimentalism, he continued and emphasized one aspect of the work of Rousseau, and, with Richardson, became one of the chief foreign influences exerted upon the romantic movement in France.

But it was not till the time of Gibbon that any English author duplicated the success of Hume in the Parisian salon, for none had so nearly satisfied the conditions required of an *esprit fort*. Gibbon was the destroyer of ancient superstitions, who had attacked ecclesiastical tyranny with a new weapon. The scepticism out of which Hume had made a philosophy became in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* a new historical method as deadly as it was disguised. For Gibbon, as for Hume, the salon was a sort of Valhalla, at once a reward and an arena, in which, surrounded by his peers, he was to continue his slaughterous career. Success came at once. He was more popular than Hume, for he did not have the social defects which had, after a time, somewhat dimmed the lustre of Hume's success. He had, for example, no difficulty with the French language, a tongue which he had spoken from his youth.[1] Madame du Deffand found him as French as her closest friends,[2] and Madame

[1] His father had sent him to Lausanne at the age of sixteen. His first literary venture, his *Essai sur l'Étude de la Littérature*, was in French.

[2] *Lettres à Walpole* 3. 342; 8 June 1777.

Necker rebuked him for allowing a Frenchman to translate his *History* when he could have done it better himself.[1] Moreover, though he was an uglier duckling than Hume, his manners had a pomposity which did not encourage familiarity. 'Il ne tombe pas dans les mêmes ridicules,' said Madame du Deffand, who regarded it as no slight achievement to avoid becoming a fool when surrounded by fools.[2]

Something of Gibbon's success was due to a period of preparation, as it were, an earlier career in the salons fourteen years before. He had received his training in 1763 when, at the age of twenty-six, he had come to Paris to meet the literary world, to membership in which he felt himself entitled by his *Essai sur l'Étude de la Littérature*, a work which had achieved the dignity of a second edition. Lady Hervey had furnished him with an introduction to Madame Geoffrin, and he found a place weekly at her famous Wednesday dinners. He visited other salons, notably those of Madame du Bocage and of the Baron d'Holbach, who had entertained Sterne the year before. Helvétius treated him like a friend.[3] It was a sufficient success for a young man. It was not to be expected that he should leave an impress upon Parisian society at this time, nor did he; but there is little doubt that

[1] Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works* 2. 247; 21 April 1781.

[2] *Lettres à Walpole*, 3. 367; 21 September 1777.

[3] *Private Letters*, ed. Prothero, 1. 29; 12 February 1763. Cf. *Memoirs*, ed. Hill, p. 153.

that society contributed in some measure to his lucidity of vision and to the prevailing spirit of disillusion for which he was presently to be famous.

When he returned to Paris in 1777 he shone in no reflected light, for the publication of the first volume of his *Decline and Fall* in the preceding year had already made him a European reputation. The book was almost immediately translated into French. The spirit of the work, and in particular the famous explanation of the development of Christianity, appealed to the philosophers. The indignant but somewhat ineffectual attacks of pious English folk upon the rationalistic historian pleased them hardly less. Gibbon's reception was all that he could desire. 'I was introduced,' he tells us in his *Memoirs*, 'to the first names and characters of France, who distinguished me by such marks of civility and kindness as gratitude will not suffer me to forget and modesty will not allow me to enumerate.' According to his own account,[1] he shone in disputes, and got his great victory over the Abbé Mably in the discussion concerning the republican form of government. But in general, the French were struck by his affability. Madame du Deffand could

[1] Walpole's account of him in dispute is less flattering. 'He coloured; all his round features squeezed themselves into sharp angles; he screwed up his button-mouth and [rapped] his snuffbox. . . . I well knew his vanity, even about his ridiculous face and person, but thought he had too much sense to avow it so palpably.' *Letters* 11. 376; 27 January 1781. Gibbon avoided disputes with Johnson, and Boswell (*Life* 2. 348) assumed that he feared 'a competition of abilities.'

find no other fault in him than his abiding desire to please, and observed that *beaux esprits* had the same fascination for him that the weapons of Odysseus had for the disguised Achilles. At times he seemed servile, and she was on the point of telling him to comfort himself with the reflection that he deserved to be a Frenchman.[1]

But though he was much in the company of Madame du Deffand, that 'agreeable young lady of eighty-two,'[2] to whom Walpole had given him a letter of introduction; though he found the best company in Paris in her salon, and made numerous visits with her (notably to the Marquise de Boufflers'); though he constantly took supper with her[3] when she happened to be supping at home, it was not with her that he was most intimate during his triumphant months in Paris. His name will ever be linked with that of Madame Necker. His relations with her had begun nearly a quarter of a century before, and may be read, in a somewhat ameliorated version, in his own *Memoirs;* the lady's story is more fully set forth by the Vicomte d'Haussonville in *Le Salon de Madame Necker.* It will suffice to say here that, after being jilted by Gibbon, the ambitious young Suisse had married a man destined to be hardly less famous in his own time, had moved to Paris, studied, as it were, under Madame

[1] *Lettres à Walpole* 3. 343, 351, and 376.
[2] *Private Lettres* 1. 312; 16 June 1777.
[3] *Lettres à Walpole* 3. 336.

Geoffrin, and at length opened a salon of her own. Though less brilliantly gifted than other hostesses, she was perhaps even more ambitious than they. There is something modern about her passion for improvement. She was not unwilling to be a *femme savante*. She disputed with the philosophers and recorded philosophical platitudes, along with gossip and rules of grammar, in her commonplace-book. It may have been the literary ambition of this lady, it may have been her essential sweetness of character, it may have been some form of feminine pride, that led her to seek friendship with the man who had once refused her his love. During her visit to London in 1776, Hume was constant in his attentions to her and to her husband. In September, after her return to France, she wrote to him,[1] urging him to come to her: 'C'est à Paris qu'il est agréable d'être un grand homme.' When at length he came, she would no doubt have been glad to 'plant' him in her house, after the French custom; but Gibbon preferred his freedom: 'The reception I have met with from them,' he writes,[2] 'very far surpassed my most sanguine expectations. I do not indeed lodge in their house (as it might excite the jealousy of the husband, and procure me a letter de cachet), but I live very much with them, dine and sup whenever they have company, which is almost every day, and whenever I like it, for they are not in

[1] Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works* 2. 178; 30 September 1776.
[2] *Miscellaneous Works* 1. 312; 16 June 1777.

the least exigeans.' Their satisfaction was no less than Gibbon's. His serious conversation delighted the serious soul of Madame Necker [1] by its union of interest in details with enthusiasm for great principles, and by the sundry graces which adorned it.

Madame du Deffand always felt that Gibbon's respect for the standards of the *beaux esprits* had corrupted his style. She heard in it the declamatory tone of the salons; it had the glitter and the lust for fame with which she was well acquainted.[2] She knew of course that this could not have been the result of Gibbon's later sojourn in Paris, but she was aware that he had come under the influence of the French salons during an earlier visit. Her hypothesis, which accounts for something of the inflated rhetoric of Gibbon, is certainly worthy of attention; and it may be noted, in support of her view, that Madame Necker, who is a fair measure of what the *philosophes* wanted, found in Gibbon's style a 'captivating magic.' [3]

[1] She wrote him in January 1777: 'Votre entretien, Monsieur, a toujours été un grand plaisir de ma vie, car vous réunissez l'interêt pour les petites choses, l' enthousiasme pour les grandes, l'abondance des idées, à l'attention pour celles des autres, et une légère causticité, âme de la conversation, à l'indulgence du moment, la sûreté du caractère et le courage de l'amitié.' Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works* 2. 193. Madame du Deffand applied to Gibbon's conversation a phrase of Fontenelle's, 'forte de choses.' *Lettres à Walpole* 3. 338; 27 May 1777.

[2] 'C'est le ton de nos beaux esprits: il n'y a que des ornements, de la parure, du clinquant, et point du fond . . . il a, si je ne me trompe, une grande ambition de célébrité; il brigue à force ouverte la faveur de tous nos beaux esprits.' *Lettres à Walpole* 3. 357; 10 August 1777.

[3] Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works* 2. 247; 21 April 1781.

When Gibbon left Paris there was universal regret. At the Neckers' they talked of nothing but this bereavement[1] and the hope of a return. He went back, in pudgy complacency, to his historical studies. He had conversed and even disputed with the prophets of a new era; but like the other rationalists, he seems to have had no suspicion of the great change which was presently to make salons impossible. His ignorance of the approaching storm is a significant illustration of the fact that the discussions of the salon were essentially academic, conducted in happy ignorance of the results which were destined to succeed them.

[1] Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works* 2. 214; 12 November 1777.

PART II

THE ENGLISH SALON

CHAPTER V

The Earlier English Salon

The first English salons, broadly so termed, appear in the age of Elizabeth. A tradition of the social patronage of letters was then established which had a short though brilliant history and which might, under favourable conditions, have become of permanent importance to the literature. It could not, however, survive the period of the Civil Wars and the Commonwealth; and thus the earlier English salon, despite its promising beginning, goes from less to less until it disappears altogether about 1700. The later salon had no connection with it; indeed the eighteenth century seems to have been quite unaware of its existence. The earlier institution was perhaps more national in character; it was certainly more vital, and it will therefore be profitable to sketch its history, if only for purposes of contrast. This earlier movement must be carefully distinguished from the larger subject of woman's place in English literature, from her contribution to and her growing interest in it; above all, it must be distinguished from the history of English *femmes savantes*. Such a larger subject there is, but I have no intention of treating it here. My purpose is merely to point out those social and literary institu-

tions set up by English women which correspond in a general way with the salons as described in the second and third chapters of this work.

The Elizabethan prototype of the salon is even closer to the Renaissance courts than the French salons themselves. The greatest of the Elizabethan patronesses, the Countess of Pembroke, was, even in her own day, compared with Elizabeth Gonzaga,[1] and her house at Wilton, which contemporaries refer to as a 'college' or 'school,' was like nothing so much as the little academe that we have seen to be characteristic of Italy. Although the most distinguished female writer of her age, the Countess of Pembroke was, and is, better known for her coterie than for her writings. 'She was,' says Aubrey, 'the greatest patronesse of wit and learning of any lady of her time.'[2] Spenser hailed her (in true salon style) as Urania, and Meres compared her to Octavia, Virgil's patroness. Like her brother, she was enthusiastic for the classical tradition, and used her influence with Kyd and Daniel to keep Senecan tragedy alive. The dedication to Daniel's *Defence of Ryme* implies that the book was produced under her immediate inspiration. The author refers to Wilton as his 'best schoole,' in the same tone in which Spenser acknowledges himself 'bounden' to it 'by many singular favours and great

[1] Nicholas Breton's *Pilgrimage to Paradise*, quoted by Miss Young.

[2] These and the like illustrations are drawn from Miss Frances Young's *Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*, London 1912.

graces.' Miss Young, the recent biographer of the Countess, who proclaims her 'in the very best sense of the word a bluestocking,' marshals a list of twenty works dedicated to her, and the list might be almost indefinitely extended by adding to it the passages in Elizabethan poetry written in her praise. To neglect the latter would be to pass over some of the most typical utterances of Edmund Spenser.

Thus Elizabethan England saw the salon at its finest. With the ideal of courtly society numerous translations of the Italian classics had already made it familiar. There is evidence of the ideal everywhere in Shakespeare's romantic comedies. The preciosity of the court of Navarre and the whole tone of *Love's Labour's Lost*, the badinage of Benedick and Beatrice, the poetic dialogue of Lorenzo and Jessica in praise of the night, and even the mingling of the courtly and the pastoral in the life of Arden Forest — these are all near to the spirit of the Renaissance court and the society with which we are dealing. The company of gallant men and gracious women idealized in Shakespeare's comedies might well have served as the model of the salon, had the seventeenth century fostered the development of anything so courtly.

Hardly less distinguished is the group of men who surrounded Lucy, Countess of Bedford. Her house at Twickenham Park, famous for its Holbeins and its garden, she loved to fill with men of genius. Ben Jonson, Chapman, Davies, Drayton, and Daniel were

all proud to call themselves her friend, and almost every one of them dedicated to her some work of permanent value in English literature. Jonson addressed to her a poetical epistle and three characteristic epigrams. His language, though pompous, is probably sincere:

> Lucy, you brightness of our sphere, who are
> The Muses' evening as their morning-star.[1]

The Countess was the recipient of more great verse than the entire group of bluestockings. Daniel, who celebrated her in the *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, has been called her poet laureate, and there would be no reason for rejecting the title if it did not more properly belong to John Donne. Not only did that poet write *Twicknam Garden* in her honour, and address her repeatedly in verse epistles which praise her beauty, virtue, and learning in terms of the most affectionate extravagance, but, says Mr. Gosse, owed to her the very revival of interest in his art.[2] Donne's letters seem to show that he submitted poems to the judgment of the Countess; for she was herself a poet, and is thought to have written one of the elegies commonly attributed to Donne.[3] Certain it is that at her

[1] Epigram 94.

[2] *Life and Letters of John Donne* 1. 212. Her 'refining' influence on Donne's mind and judgment is particularly noted in his second *Letter to the Countess of Bedford.*

[3] Professor Grierson attributes to her the poem beginning,

> 'Death, be not proud, thy hand gave not this blow.'

See his edition of Donne's poems, 2. cxliv.

house he enjoyed the very type of society which, a century later, made the fame of salons. He always speaks of Lady Bedford with the same gratitude and awe which may be found in Castiglione's praise of the Duchess of Urbino; he accepted the same sort of pecuniary assistance from her that Frenchmen received from Madame Geoffrin. Nay, more, he goes to her in her garden that he may, at eye and ear,

> Receive such balmes as else cure everything.[1]

He writes to Sir Henry Goodyer:

> For her delight (since she descends to them) I had reserved not only all the verses I should make, but all the thoughts of women's worthiness.

He is concerned not to be lightly esteemed 'in that Tribe and that house' where he has lived.[2]

In all respects, therefore, the Countess's coterie would seem to stand just half-way between court and salon — if it is necessary to distinguish the two terms at all. If it is urged that we have no evidence of the stimulus wrought by conversation in the group, it may be answered that even this lack is apparent only and is due simply to the meagreness of contemporary records.

Similarly slender is our knowledge of other women whom we ought in all probability to associate with the two just discussed: Lady Rutland, Lady Wroth, and the Countess of Huntington, women who felt a keen

[1] *Twicknam Garden.* [2] Gosse 2. 79; 1651.

interest in poets and in the welfare of poetry. As it is, the death of Lady Bedford in 1627 must be taken as marking the end of the Elizabethan system of feminine patronage.

With the accession of Charles I and the supremacy of French social ideals in the person of Queen Henrietta Maria, a change comes over the salon. A new side of it is developed, and an older side is forgotten. What had been a court of patronage became a court of love. The system of Platonic love, which is a characteristic mark of salons at various periods, comes to the fore. It had existed in the earlier salons, as Donne's Petrarchan devotion to the Countess of Bedford is sufficient to show; but the new order of things made it the centre of all. This shift of emphasis was a loss to the salon, for literature — or rather poetry — became a tool in the process of courtship rather than an end in itself; and the mistress accepted poetical conceits and extravagant lyrics as evidence of worship from her 'servants' in love. Thus the whole system of courtly love was introduced hot from France, and the subtleties and silliness of the *précieuses galantes* were seen in England.[1] The type of the new salon mistress is the Countess Carlisle, a Percy by birth, the favourite of Henrietta Maria, and the idol of the court. She

[1] This subject is pleasantly discussed by Professor Fletcher in his *Religion of Beauty in Woman*, 'Précieuses at the Court of Charles I,' but his discussion shows how inimical was the new movement to anything like a true patronage of letters.

received poetical tributes of the conventional kind from half the poets of the era, and the story of her gallantries — to give them no harsher name — is a part of the history of England.

Intrigue is the natural result of gallantry such as this, and intrigue lasted long after the original Platonic impetus was spent. Intrigue naturally tends away from social life: Platonic emotions make excellent subjects for discussion, but intrigue is impatient of talk. Any one who will compare Cartwright's *Panegyric to the Countess of Carlisle* with Suckling's *Lady Carlisle Walking in Hampton Court Garden* may see how readily Platonic ecstasies sank into the filth of the mire. The two poems measure the extremes of courtly verse, and define its nature. It ranges, as Mr. Fletcher has said, 'all the way from exalted mysticism through mere gallantry, to mocking cynicism.' Although these moods all flourished in the foreign salons of various periods, they never became in England the peculiar attributes of salon life as distinct from mere social customs. They passed on to the salons of the Restoration little more than a general tradition of Platonic and pastoral mannerism and a handful of classical pseudonyms useful to the conventionally amorous.

When with the Restoration the feminine influence on the current of literature emerges once more, it is again changed in aspect — like everything else. So far as the destinies of the English salon are concerned,

the Restoration marks no real advance. If there is not an actual loss of ground, there is at least a change of direction. Women now become aspirants to an independent literary reputation. The groups which literary women formed about themselves never quite suggest the atmosphere of the salon, for their aims seldom give evidence of a desire to approach literature from the social side.[1] It was no longer the ambition of woman to rule the world of letters from above or from beyond as a sort of Muse by whose aid and in whose honour all was to be done, but to enter that world herself and there to claim equality with man. It was again only a shift of emphasis, but it was sufficient to destroy the social aspect of the salon. A salon is not a school of professionals.

It seems strange that the Parisian salon should not have been imported bodily by the returning courtiers. A French salon was for a time conducted at court, as we shall see; but it was not brought there through English influence, and always remained a foreign growth, not even adopting the English language. English literary women, despite the presence of this model, seem to have been incapable of creating anything more than a circle of friends, cordially interested in their literary ambitions, but hardly considering the coterie the highest social expression of the literary life.

[1] Thus there is no suggestion of the salon about such a figure as the Duchess of Newcastle.

The nearest approach to salon life in this period is the coterie formed by the 'matchless Orinda,' Mrs. Katherine Philips. This amiable young woman, with a gift for versifying and a truly social instinct, achieved no slight reputation in her own day. At Cardigan Priory, her Welsh estate, she conducted something very like a salon. 'She instituted,' says Mr. Gosse,[1] 'a Society of Friendship to which male and female members were admitted, and in which poetry, religion and the human heart were to form the subjects of discussion.' Here is the salon spirit and a reliance on conversation as the truest inspiration to social life — a thing which we shall not encounter again till the days of the bluestockings. Orinda adopted the prevalent custom of giving literary names to her friends, indulged in Platonic friendships of the most florid kind, praised her female friends in verse, and despatched glowing sentiments to them in letters:

> I gasp for you with an impatience that is not to be imagined by any soul wound up to a less concern in friendship than yours is, and therefore I cannot hope to make others sensible of my vast desires to enjoy you.[2]

Whatever interest Mrs. Philips's works may possess must be shared with this group, with 'Rosania,' 'Lucasia,' 'Poliarchus,' and the rest, for to them a large

[1] *Seventeenth Century Studies*, p. 208.

[2] To 'Berenice,' in *Familiar Letters*, London 1697; 1. 147; 30 December 1658.

proportion of her writing was directly addressed. It is to be regretted that we are not more fully informed regarding the relations of certain eminent men with the coterie. The general interest felt by the Royalist poets in her career has been taken to point to a personal connection with her, but it is doubtful whether the relations of such men as Dryden, Cowley, and Denham with her were anything more than formally courteous. To them she was a new phenomenon in the literary world, a female author, a prodigy that attracted attention but did not threaten rivalry — a woman and therefore to be flattered, a poetess and therefore to be called a tenth Muse. Cowley, who equates her with Pope Joan, is almost comic in his praise:

> But if Apollo should design
> A woman laureat to make,
> Without dispute he would Orinda take,
> Though Sappho and the famous Nine
> Stood by and did repine.[1]

But this is elegy, nor burlesque.

With Jeremy Taylor, 'Palæmon,' the case is differ-

[1] *On the Death of Mrs. Katherine Philips.* In his *Ode on Orinda's Poems* the lady's descent is traced from Boadicea. Rowe, in his *Epistle to Daphnis*, declares that she soared as high as Corneille 'and equalled all his fame.' Dryden compares her with Mrs. Killigrew. Cowley may perhaps have owed more than the rest to her. The following reference to him in her letters seems to show that she had been of real service to him: 'I am very glad of Mr. Cowley's success, and will concern myself so much as to thank your ladyship for your endeavour in it.' (To Berenice, *Familiar Letters* 1. 143; 25 June [1758 ?].)

ent. In 1657 he put forth a duodecimo volume entitled *A Discourse of the Nature, Offices and Measures of Friendship*, which, the title-page announces, was 'written in answer to a Letter from the most ingenious and vertuous M. K. P.' Orinda had written to Taylor, with whom she must have been already on terms of intimacy, to inquire 'how far a dear and perfect friendship is authorized by the principles of Christianity.' The answer is a wholly delightful essay which was widely popular in the seventeenth century and deserves to be more generally known to-day. Taylor praises Mrs. Philips as 'not only greatly instructed by the direct notices of things, but also by great experience in the matter of which you now inquire.' He concludes that it is not ill that she should 'entertain brave friendships and worthy societies'; but takes occasion to warn her against the fantastic Platonism of the salon: [1]

> They that build castles in the aire, and look upon friendship, as upon a fine Romance, a thing that pleases the fancy, but is good for nothing else will doe well when they are asleep, or when they come to Elysium; and for ought I know in the mean time may be as much in love with *Mandana* in the *Grand Cyrus*, as with the *Countess of Exeter;* and by dreaming of perfect and abstracted friendships, make them so immaterial that they perish in the handling and become good for nothing.

In the postscript to Mrs. Philips, she is requested to forward the essay to Dr. Wedderburn, if she 'shall

[1] *Discourse*, p. 38.

think it fit that these pass further' than her own 'eye and closet.' Such was Taylor's trust in Orinda; such his tribute to her.

It must be admitted that Orinda's relations with the authors of her time are little short of remarkable. Her name is written across some of the most characteristic poetry of the age. When she was but twenty, commendatory verses by her were prefixed to the Poems of Vaughan the Silurist. Before the end of her short life — she died in 1664, soon after her thirty-fourth birthday — she had even attracted the notice of Dryden. Her contemporaries appear to have been serious in their belief that she had made herself a permanent place in English literature, and for many years after her death kept her fame alive by publishing her plays, poems, and letters, in which she was invariably described as 'celebrated,' 'matchless,' and 'incomparable.' Her coterie made but little impression on the literature of its time; but that may well have been due to its short career. Mrs. Philips possessed a refinement of taste and of character by no means common among the literary ladies of the time, and a noble though highly sentimental affection for her friends. These are characteristics which, had she lived, she might have made of practical advantage to the world of letters.

On a somewhat lower social plane the notorious Mrs. Aphra Behn carried on the traditions of the matchless Orinda. Like her, Mrs. Behn had her coterie which

she celebrated in conventional lyrics. In the poem entitled *Our Cabal*, the various members are described under pastoral pseudonyms, Alexis, Damon, Amoret, and the like. It is impossible to identify the persons referred to, but it is unlikely that any of them attained to literary fame. Gallantry, coquetry, and the whole paraphernalia of the amatory art formed the exclusive business of the coterie. With the world of letters it had little to do. Thus it touches the salon upon its least important side. But Mrs. Behn, or 'Astræa,' as her friends rashly called her, developed another side by emulating the practice of Mlle. Scudéry, and weaving certain of her own adventures — for she had had many — into the body of her novels. This practice of colouring the events of an interminable romance with personal allusions and allegorical meanings was one of the principal results of salon activity in Paris during the later seventeenth century; but it is not characteristic of the salon at its finest and was, so far as English literature was concerned, but a fad which had no future at all. Moreover Mrs. Behn's romances lack what is best in the type, that courtliness which can alone redeem such works from artificiality and dulness. It is true that Mrs. Behn escapes dulness, but she does not achieve courtliness. Thus she misses the very point at which such work may come under the influence of fine society. As it is, far from serving the cause of literature by attracting authors to the urbanities of life, her scandalous novels brought both their

author and her profession into disrepute. Her unique achievement was to show that a woman could make her living by her pen. Her career brought her inevitably into touch and even into competition with male authors, and her easy manners enabled her to associate on terms of pleasant familiarity with Dryden and Otway; but all this is suggestive rather of the *camaraderie* of the modern literary world than of the atmosphere of salons.

Meanwhile Hortense, Duchess of Mazarin, and niece of the Cardinal of that name, had set up in London a genuine French salon. It owes its somewhat exotic fame entirely to the Chevalier de Saint Évremond who wrote of its mistress in language of the most riotous hyperbole. Some of the best-known pages of this amorous old wit were produced in honour of the fair French refugee at the court of Charles II. He wrote poems to her; he wrote a 'portrait' of her, in which her charms are analysed in such detail as almost to indicate a state of dotage in him; to satisfy a whim of hers he wrote a Funeral Oration for her while she was yet alive that she might see her praises set forth in the manner of Bossuet. He wrote a discourse on religion to embody the thoughts which she had drawn out during a conversation in her salon. In a letter to her, which accompanied the essay, he asserts that she has given the lie to the old statement that truth must be banished from ordinary conversation, for

she can make truth so attractive as to reconcile all minds to it and restore it to its proper place in the world.[1] But all this is a mere speck in the avalanche of flattery. Her conversation, he assures her elsewhere,[2] surpasses Plutarch in gravity, Seneca in sententiousness, and Montaigne in depth.

But the philosophic goddess and her withered prophet were not always happy together. The Duchess was overfond of bassette, a game in which Saint Évremond indulged chiefly to please her, lamenting the loss of her conversation the while, and addressing poetical protests to her. The passion for gaming, which threatened to become a profession or a fury with her, is less revolting than the *amours* in which the lady (more beautiful than Helen or Cleopatra [3]) involved herself. The fascination of the Merry Monarch and the death of a favourite lover after a duel fought with an infatuated nephew, bring her love-affairs out of the Platonic atmosphere, so essential to salons, into the realm of ugly realism.

The salon Mazarin, which came to an end with the death of the Duchess in 1699, thus tended to associate the literary hostess with vice as well as with letters. As Mrs. Behn had degraded the name of woman in the world of hack-writers, so the Duchess of Mazarin

[1] *Works* of Saint Évremond, English translation, 2d edition, London 1728; 2. 247.

[2] *Ib.* 2. 299.

[3] Her beauty was celebrated by Waller in *The Triple Combat.* Lely painted her portrait.

degraded it in the drawing-room. Her salon represented a vicious and a foreign institution, which, though it gained a foothold at Court, was quite without influence upon English life and literature.

With the death of the Duchess of Mazarin we reach the end of the seventeenth century and the end of anything like a salon in England until the time of the bluestockings. The results of the feminist movement at the close of that century [1] are seen in two distinct yet definitely related facts. In the first place, a large number of women were encouraged, by the success of Mrs. Behn, to attempt the production of literature, and the female author and wit became a current subject of satire. With all this we have here nothing to do. Women like Catherine Trotter, Mary Pix, and Mrs. Manley, far from promoting the social recognition of literature, tended to deflect the influence of woman from the drawing-room to the noise and strife of Grub Street. The satire that was poured out on them and their kind as learned women must not be taken to point to the existence of anything like a salon, strictly considered. Terms borrowed from French

[1] See Dr. Upham's 'English Femmes Savantes at the End of the Seventeenth Century,' in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, April 1913. This is a fairly exhaustive treatment of the subject, and reveals a development of 'feminism' in England parallel in some respects with that in France. As the movement, however, reveals no attempt to centre literary activity in salons, the article must be regarded as treating a different aspect of the general subject from the one here dealt with.

literature were freely flung about; but references to *ruelles* and *femmes savantes* were so loosely used that they are not to be thought of having the same significance when repeated by English authors that they have in their own country.

In the second place, and largely as a result of the opinion in which such female wits were held, we find a mass of tracts, consisting of Defences of, Apologies for, and Serious Proposals to Women, all working towards a vindication of the sex. Such vindications frequently strike the reader as having been written to prove the very charges which they exist to rebut. In any case, this flood of feeble defences seems to show that woman had forgotten her high office as inspirer and patron of letters, which she had hitherto always taken for granted, and had decided to occupy herself with vague questions of equality and natural capacity. We have moved far from the spacious times of the Countess of Pembroke.

In the age of Anne, English women lost what was probably the best chance they ever had to reëstablish the feminine patronage of letters which distinguished the age of Elizabeth. The tone of urbanity which characterized the literature of the early eighteenth century ought to have given birth to salons. The presence of a Stuart queen upon the throne and the supremacy of a school of authors by no means averse from social pleasures, offered a unique opportunity to women to give social expression to their interest in

literature and to inspire and assist authors. But the opportunity was lost. Feminine activity in the literary world continued to be associated with notorious names, with the scurrilous *New Atlantis* of Mary Manley, and with the loose career of Mrs. Centlivre. Women authors were already Bohemians. 'In the female world,' says Johnson in his *Life of Addison*, 'any acquaintance with books was distinguished only to be censured.'

This pronouncement of Johnson's is of that large general nature which is likely to give offence to specialists. A multitude of exceptions to it will occur at once to any one. The Duchess of Queensbury, for example, patronized Gay; Dean Swift was not uninfluenced by the women who surrounded him; Pope addressed verse-epistles to Martha Blount; later in the century, Young satirized the literary female, and Richardson had his group of adoring 'Daughters.' But none of these really changes the significance of Johnson's summary. When he referred to the censure visited upon literary women he may well have been thinking of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, whose acquaintance with the authors of her time was wider than that ever possessed by the bluestockings. But though the noble lady had genuine interest in letters and very remarkable powers, she was wholly without that courtly character which is indispensable to the hostess of a salon. She repelled men as much by her insolent cleverness as by her slovenly manners. Fi-

nally her long residence abroad withdrew her completely from the literary circle which she knew so well.

It was the work of the middle decades of the eighteenth century to remove the odium in which women's interest in literature had been held. The world of female readers became almost as large and influential as that of the male, so that by 1778 Johnson could remark, 'All our ladies read now.' The Bluestocking Club, which marks the first definite reappearance of the salon in London, shows the desire of woman to extend her function in the literary world so as to include in it the office of patron, as well as that of author and reader. But this new patronage was to be primarily social, and was to express itself first in various social diversions, which preluded the more formal salons, and to which we now proceed.

CHAPTER VI

Conversation Parties and Literary Assemblies

Not the least pleasant of the social gatherings for conversation was the levee, or reception held on rising from bed. The custom was of course adopted by people of fashion in imitation of the popular court function, and it always retained something of the courtly atmosphere, its popularity in fine society being due to the sense of importance which it lent to the host or hostess. Madame de Tencin, for example, thus held court from eight o'clock in the morning, queening it over everybody, 'from the lowest tools to the highest.' [1] Mascarille, it will be remembered, boasts that he never rises from bed without the company of half a dozen *beaux esprits*. Yet despite its imitation of the court, there must have been about this kind of reception a certain intimacy and ease that were lacking in the more formal assemblies held later in the day.[2]

In England the levee had been known for perhaps

[1] So Madame du Deffand told Walpole. Walpole's *Letters* 10. 28.

[2] Guests were not necessarily received in the sleeping-room. The adjoining dressing-room was often utilized for the purpose. See Colman's *Man of Business* (1774), opening of Act 2. The levee should be compared with Mme. de Rambouillet's more intimate receptions, where a seat near

THE LEVEE

From an engraving of the fourth painting in Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode*

a hundred years;[1] but it first becomes of importance to the student of literature about the middle of the century. A good general impression of it may be obtained from the fourth plate of Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode*, published in 1745. The hostess, half dressed, is seated at her toilet-table, under the ministrations of her hair-dresser, and is engaged in conversation with her lover, who is reclining on a sofa near by. In the background is seen the bed, one curtain of which is still drawn. A negro butler is passing chocolate to the guests who are ranged in front of the bed, while an Italian tenor is regaling them with solos to the accompaniment of a flute. This latter point is significant in the satire, for it is evident that the hostess is incapable of conducting a true conversazione, and has therefore had recourse to providing her guests with other entertainment, while she pursues her amorous intrigue.

A later and even more familiar representation of the levee is found at the opening of the *School for Scandal*, where Lady Sneerwell is 'discovered' at her toilet. When this scene is correctly represented on the stage

the bedside, in the *ruelle* or lane between bed and wall, was the place of honour, as being nearest to the hostess while she reclined in state.

Morning informality became so popular in Paris that ladies and gentlemen of quality appeared at lectures, 'même en robe de chambre' (Roberts' *Memoirs of Hannah More* 2. 17). Cf. Goldsmith (*Citizen of the World*, Letter 77), 'the modern manner of some of our nobility receiving company in their morning gowns.'

[1] As early as the days of the *Spectator*, Addison deplored the custom, introduced by travelled ladies, of 'receiving gentlemen in their bed-rooms.'

the lady's guests are shown as drinking chocolate at her levee, and there characteristically displaying their conversational gifts.

That the levee was at its best essentially a literary function is shown by the encouragement it received from Samuel Johnson. The account of his morning receptions is preserved for us by Dr. Maxwell, whose description must be quoted in full:

> About twelve o'clock I commonly visited him, and frequently found him in bed, or declaiming over his tea, which he drank very plentifully. He generally had a levee of morning visitors, chiefly men of letters; Hawkesworth, Goldsmith, Murphy, Langton, Steevens, Beauclerk, etc., etc., and sometimes learned ladies, particularly I remember a French lady of wit and fashion doing him the honour of a visit.[1] He seemed to be considered as a kind of public oracle, whom everybody thought they had a right to visit and consult; and doubtless they were well rewarded.[2]

When Johnson visited Boswell in Edinburgh after the tour of the Hebrides 'he had, from ten o'clock to one or two, a constant levee of various persons, of different characters and descriptions;' so that poor Mrs. Boswell was obliged to 'devote the greater part of the morning to the endless task of pouring out tea.'[3]

This custom, thus sanctioned by fashion and by literary authority, was adopted by all who pretended

[1] Probably, as Hill notes, Mme. de Boufflers; cf. above, p. 53.

[2] Boswell's *Life* 2. 118; cf. 3. 207.

[3] Boswell's *Life* 5. 395; here the word levee is probably loosely employed for a morning conversazione.

to wit. In 1760, Goldsmith sneers at the philosophical beau who 'receives company in his study, in all the pensive formality of slippers, night-gown, and easy-chair.' [1] Flavia, in the same author's *Double Transformation*, after marrying an Oxford Fellow, aspires to the reputation of a *femme savante:*

> Proud to be seen she kept a bevy
> Of powdered coxcombs at her levee.

By 1779 the function had become so popular that its name was frequently extended to any formal entertainment where conversation was the principal attraction, even when it was held in the evening.[2]

The levee merged easily into the formal breakfast. This function might occur at any hour from eight o'clock in the morning to three in the afternoon.[3] It was in 1750 that Madame du Bocage recorded her impressions of Mrs. Montagu's breakfasts, generalizing upon the custom of the nation in these words:

> In the morning breakfasts which enchant as much by the exquisite viands as by the richness of the plate in which they are served up, agreeably bring together both the people of the country and strangers [*i.e.*, both natives and foreigners].[4]

The diaries and letters of Beattie, Mrs. Delany, Miss Burney, and Miss More are strewn with references to

[1] *Citizen of the World*, Letter 104.
[2] Cf. Boswell's *Life of Johnson* 2. 318.
[3] *Diary of Mme. D'Arblay* 5. 80–81.
[4] *Letters* (1770) 1. 7; 8 April 1750.

this fashionable meal. In the spring of 1774, Walpole professes himself frightened at the inundation of them coming on.[1] A favourite diversion at these matutinal parties, as at entertainments later in the day, was the declamation of Thomas Sheridan (who would repeat Gray's *Elegy*, Dryden's *Ode*, and 'everything that everybody could say by heart' [2]), the French readings of Tessier, the tragic recitations of Tighe (who expected his auditors to swoon from emotion), and, occasionally, bits of recitation or acting by Garrick. Sheridan gave so many of these literary breakfasts that Mrs. Boscawen suspected that he received money for them.[3] At times such functions were more or less public, and were held in the Haymarket, at Vauxhall, or at Bath, in the Assembly Rooms.

The receptions of the later afternoon and evening are of a less definite character. Beattie describes a gathering at Mrs. Montagu's as 'an assembly or conversation or rout.' [4] The entertainment was of wide scope, as in Italian and French drawing-rooms, and might include dancing, card-playing, and literary readings, as well as conversation.[5] In this work we

[1] *Letters* 8. 437.

[2] Roberts' *Memoirs of More* 1. 395.

[3] *Correspondence of Mrs. Delany* 6. 229; 7 September 1784.

[4] Diary for 10 May 1773; M. Forbes' *Life of Beattie*, p. 75.

[5] Hannah More's piquant description of an assembly is worth quoting in full:

'On Monday I was at a very great assembly at the Bishop of Saint Asaph's. Conceive to yourself one hundred and fifty or two hundred people met together, dressed in the extremity of the fashion; painted as red as

are concerned only with the literary aspect of these parties; the origin and the more serious results of the London salon are discussed elsewhere, so that the rest of this chapter may be devoted to a consideration of the means adopted for shining in conversation at these parties, and the attempt to connect such assemblies directly with the production of poetry.

It is surely a misfortune that contemporary descriptions of the conversazione should be generally satirical in tone; but it is natural enough, for conversation, unsupported by other entertainment, tends, in large groups, to pedantry on the one hand, and to frivolousness on the other. English literature produced no Molière to satirize the salons; but the conversazione did give both character and title to one great comedy, the *School for Scandal.* Although this play is not, like the *Critique de l'École des Femmes*, an adequate criticism of the literary drawing-room, it does nevertheless preserve prominent aspects of it, and we shall have occasion to refer to it repeatedly in illustrating the nature of the conversazione.[1] Another criticism

bacchanals; poisoning the air with perfumes; treading on each other's gowns; making the crowd they blame; not one in ten able to get a chair; protesting they are engaged to ten other places; and lamenting the fatigue they are not obliged to endure; ten or a dozen card-tables, crammed with dowagers of quality, grave ecclesiastics, and yellow admirals; and you have an idea of an assembly.' Roberts' *Memoirs of More* 1. 242; cf. *ib.* 1. 311.

[1] Other contemporary descriptions of the salon will be found elsewhere in this volume. Still others — in general more fragmentary — may be consulted in Frances Brooke's *Excursion* 1. 142, Roberts' *Memoirs of More* 2. 22–23; 1. 92–93; 174; 317.

of this entertainment is found in a book now totally forgotten, entitled, *Modern Manners, or the Country Cousins, in a series of Poetical Epistles.* This is the work of the Rev. Samuel Hoole, son of the translator of Tasso and Ariosto, and appeared in the year 1782. The poems describe the visit of a north-English family to London, somewhat after the manner of Smollett in *Humphry Clinker*, and of Anstey in the *New Bath Guide.* The tenth epistle is an account of Lady Chattony's conversazione.[1] At that assembly old Mr. Ralph Rusty is served with lukewarm coffee and tea and a minute bit of cake, which made him long for more. The company splits up into groups, each with their backs turned on the rest. The first party which he joins is (naturally) talking scandal:

'My lovely Miss Wagtail,' says pretty Beau Brisker,
'I've seen your dear friend, sweet Miss Fatty Fanfrisker.'
'— Dear creature! — she's truly what all men adore so' —
'— Faith not quite so charming but some I know more so' —
'— You difficult thing! you're as rude as a bear,
You think nobody handsome I vow and declare!
What fault can you find? — to be sure, her hair's sandy,
And Scapegrace declares that her legs are quite "bandy."'

His second visit is to a group engaged in musical gossip:

'a nymph with a white varnished face
And a sallow thin man, almost covered with lace.'

[1] Horace Walpole's experiences in the English salons at Turin and Florence may be consulted in the first volume of his *Letters.* 'Only figure the coalition of prudery, debauchery, sentiment, history, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and metaphysics; all, except the second, understood by halves, by quarters, or not at all.' 1. 82; 31 July 1740.

He escapes from their gushing ecstasies only to fall on a political discussion:

Next a party of critics and authors I joined,
And thought I had found out a set to my mind:
Cries a little black man, 'I'm convinced, Dr. Guzzle,
'Tis a poor paltry book that was mentioned by Puzzle.
I'm told too that Ratsbane and Screachowl abuse it? —
Have you, my dear Doctor, had time to peruse it?'
'O, yes, I have skimmed it — 'tis terrible trash,
An *oleo* of nonsense, an ill-savour'd *hash*.'
'Sir, good Mr. Shuttlecock's pamphlet, depend on't,
Which now is just published, will soon make an end on't' —
'I heard,' cries another, 'at Cadell's to-day,
That Johnson's in town, and is writing away;
I was charmed with his Milton; what judgment and spirit!
Mr. Rattlesnake, sure you'll allow this has merit?
You've read it, no doubt, Sir,' — 'Not I, Sir, indeed —
Read Johnson! — I'd sooner subscribe to the creed! —
His opinions, religious and civil, I hate —
Sir, he'd make us all slaves to the church and the state!' —
'Gude Sir,' cries a Scot, springing up from behind,
And presenting his snuff-box, 'you're quite o' my mind;
'Tho' the Doctor would fain give our poets the law,
O' the spirit of verse he knows nothing at a';
In spite of his critique, I canna' perceive
What there is in your poem of Adam and Eve:
An Ossian you read, Milton canna' ga doun
'Tis lik after a virgin a mess o' the toun:
No, troth, here the Doctor does nothing but dream,
For he is too purblind to ken the subleeme' —
'Hold, hold, my good friend — I must stand by old Milton,
While the sword that I wear has a blade or a hilt on;
That great politician, that torch of our nation,
Must never be mentioned without veneration:
Respecting the Doctor, you say very true,

I think him as scurvy a critic as you,
But consider him now in a worse point of view:
Pray is he not *pensioned?* — and does he not write, Sir,
To make us tame fools, and believe black is white, Sir?
All friends to our freedom that *creature* must hate
Who pockets three hundred a year from the state.'
'Gad troth, maister Rattlesnake, why do you mantion,
With so much asperity, Sir, that word *pansion?*
The Doctor deserves na sic thing — but what then
In troth, I weel know many axcellent men,
Who never have thought it a shame or disgrace
T' accept a wee pansion or snug pratty place;
But then they have a' sat doun selent as deeth —
The Doctor still vents his pestiferous breeth
Against a' Scotch tenets and Scotch reputation,
Tho' he found a gude friend in a Laird of our nation.'

'I see,' cries another, 'your anger he wakes,
Because he's no friends to the *country of cakes;*
Nor am I surpriz'd, for the place of our birth
We all of us think is the best upon earth;
And therefore we ne'er can the writer approve,
Who slights the dear land we so partially love.'

'You speak like a seer — ah! you ken, Sir, his Tour,
Our vary worst foe could have written no more;
In thot he insinuates, tho' he canna' see
Twa yards, that we've na sic a thing as a tree,
Tho' just by the road there were saxteen or twanty,
And, if he'd gone more to the laft, he'd found planty;
Nay, troth, it's a fact, Sir, that's weel understood,
Au' Scotland was antiently covered with wood.'

Mr. Rusty's unhappy evening was concluded by listening to the tales of a young lord just returned from his

travels, a buck who wishes to fight a duel with him because he laughs at incredible stories.

There is nothing very witty in this poem, as the quotations may show; and the satires no doubt sank of their own weight; but in spite of its dulness, the account would appear to be, in the main, a fair picture of the conversazione. We may notice, in the first place, that Lady Chattony has followed the best traditions of the salon in reducing her refreshments to a minimum, depending for the success of her reception entirely upon the conversation of her guests.[1] The talk, again, is not confined to a large circle; but is broken up, after Mrs. Vesey's manner, into a series of small groups. We have the usual references to gossip, scandal, and chatter about clothes, politics, and the opera, with occasional approaches to Sheridan's method of satire, but with none of his cleverness.

It is inevitable that any satire on the conversazione should dwell on the tendency to scandal and gossip.

[1] This was an important matter with some of the bluestockings, as the following quotation from Hannah More may show: 'I never knew a great party turn out so pleasantly as the other night at the Pepys's. There was all the pride of London — every wit and every wit-ess . . . but the spirit of the evening was kept up on the strength of a little lemonade till past eleven, without cards, scandal, or politics.' Roberts' *Memoirs of More* 1. 208.

Johnson's opposition to anything of the sort is shown by his remark on 'an evening society for conversation': 'There is nothing served about there, neither tea, nor coffee, nor lemonade, nor anything whatever, and depend upon it, Sir, a man does not love to go to a place from whence he comes out exactly as he went in.' Boswell's *Life* 4. 90.

He urged Mrs. Thrale to provide her guests with 'a profusion of the best sweetmeats.'

So inevitable is their presence in the salons that it seems hardly necessary to point it out; but it is essential to be at the true explanation of their prevalence, which no satire is likely to point out. Scandal, and its sister, Gossip, are the short cuts to cleverness, and cleverness is the one indispensable thing to the frequenters of salons. This is abundantly evident in the *School for Scandal.* It is wit for which Lady Sneerwell's guests are striving, and they will mar a character that they may make a *mot.* 'There is no possibility,' says Lady Sneerwell, 'of being witty without a little ill-nature; the malice of a good thing is the barb that makes it stick,' [1] and Lady Teazle is in practical agreement with her; 'I vow I bear no malice against the people I abuse; when I say an ill-natured thing 'tis out of pure good humour.'

Sheridan was not the only dramatist to satirize the salons and their scandalous talk. His comedy was imitated by Thomas Holcroft in *Seduction,*[2] a play whose popularity on the stage was equalled by its popularity in print. The conversation descriptive of an assembly at Lady Morden's is in obvious imitation of the Scandal School.

[1] How true this is to the spirit of conversation is shown by a somewhat scandalous discussion of Miss Hannah More which passed between Mrs. Cholmondeley and Miss Burney: Mrs. Cholmondeley: 'I don't like her at all; that is, I detest her! She does nothing but flatter and fawn; and then she thinks ill of nobody. Don't you hate a person who thinks ill of nobody?' *Diary of Mme. D'Arblay* 1. 188.

[2] 1787. Act 3, scene 2.

Sir Frederic. Sir Nathan Neaptide, the yellow admiral, came.
Lord Morden. An agreeable guest!
Mrs. Modely. Oh! rude as his own boatswain.
Sir Frederic. Would teach a startling blasphemy, rather than want good conversation.
Lady Morden. He attempts satire.
Lord Morden. But utters abuse.
Mrs. Modely. That makes him so much respected.
Lady Morden. Yes; like a chimney-sweeper in a crowd, he makes his way by being dirty. . . .
Sir Frederic. The widow Twinkle, as usual, talked a vast deal about reputation.
Lady Morden. One is apt to admire a thing one wants.
Lord Morden. She always takes infinite pains to place her reputation, like broken china in a buffet, with the best side outward.
Lady Morden. She may plaister, and cement, but will never bring it to bear handling.

Other aspirants to conversational fame adopted the less questionable habit of talking sentiments. Here again the *School for Scandal* reveals the trick of the salons, for Joseph Surface has won himself a place in the group by virtue of his philosophical and ethical maxims. Sheridan's brilliant satire of a reigning fad in literature and society was anticipated by Goldsmith in *She Stoops to Conquer*, in which, when Kate Hardcastle wishes to speak like a fine lady, she at once begins to talk sentiments.[1] This habit of lending a semblance of depth to one's conversation by the introduction

[1] See her first conversation with Marlow, Act II. She herself calls it sentimental, in reference to these platitudes.

of philosophical aphorisms is no doubt as old as the salon itself. At its best, there is nothing contemptible in the sentiment, as the long and brilliant history of the maxim in French literature may prove. The reputation of Mme. de Sablé's salon was largely made by the maxim or *pensée*, and all the later salons afford examples of its vitality. Madame Geoffrin was famous for it. 'Madame Geoffrin,' wrote Mme. Necker, 'a mis toute sa raison en maximes,' [1] and the same writer praises the work of English authors for their successful production of this type, finding these authors otherwise deficient in moral principles.[2] The maxim, ethical sentiment, or philosophical truth sententiously expressed, did indeed attain substantial existence in the essays of Samuel Johnson, who fancied that mankind might come in time to 'write all aphoristically;' but in English conversation it never found a thoroughly congenial soil. 'Sentiments' were popular, but, like much that was popular, they were hollow too. The Dowager Countess Gower writes to Mrs. Delany that the bluestockings are at Sunning Wells, where they 'sport sentiments from morn tell noon, from noon to dewy eve.' [3] The pages of the *Wit's Magazine* teemed with collections of them: 'Flattery, like a cameleon, assumes the colours of the object it is nearest to.' The record of bluestocking maxims and sentiments preserved in letters and diaries is amazing, but not

[1] *Mélanges* 3. 243. [2] *Ib.* 266.

[3] *Correspondence of Mrs. Delany* 4. 236; 30 August 1769.

because of its brilliance. Mrs. Montagu wrote the following to Miss Burney, in reference to the character of Mr. Vesey, 'A frippery character, like a gaudy flower, may please while it is in bloom; but it is the virtuous only that, like the aromatics, preserve their sweet and reviving odour when withered.' [1] This is exactly in the style of Julia, the once-fashionable heroine of *The Rivals*, who, in respect of her conversation, might be own sister to Joseph Surface: 'When hearts deserving of happiness would unite their fortunes, Virtue would crown them with an unfading garland of modest hurtless flowers; but ill-judging Passion will force the gaudier Rose into the wreath, whose thorn offends them when its leaves are dropped.'

Closely akin to the neatly-turned sentiment is the epigram and this, in all its forms, the salon, following Continental models, sought to stimulate. One thinks immediately of the poetical epigrams of Sir Benjamin Backbite, his impromptu verses on Lady Frizzle's feather catching fire, his rebuses, the charade which he made at Mrs. Drowsie's conversazione, and, above all, of that sprightly extempore conceit on Lady Betty Curricle's ponies:

> Sure never were seen two such beautiful ponies;
> Other horses are Clowns — and these macaronies;
> Nay, to give 'em this title I'm sure isn't wrong,
> Their legs are so slim and their tails [2] are so long.

[1] *Diary of Mme. D'Arblay* 2. 351.

[2] The tails of macaronis' wigs were notoriously long.

There was no more certain way of achieving a reputation for wit than by the impromptu composition of these little verses. No lover of Goldsmith will fail to remember Garrick's epigram on the poet who 'wrote like an angel and talked like poor Poll.' Less hackneyed is the couplet which Dr. Young produced at the 'World,' a club of gentlemen who were amusing themselves after dinner by scratching verses, with their diamonds, upon the wine-glasses. Having no jewel of his own, Young, when his turn came round, was obliged to borrow Chesterfield's, and then wrote:

> Accept a miracle: instead of wit,
> See two dull lines with Stanhope's pencil writ.[1]

It is difficult to find a volume of eighteenth century verse that does not bear witness to the popularity of the epigram. Every miscellany teems with them. No collected edition of poems was complete without a handful of them. They are recorded in every diary and commonplace-book, and were exchanged by friends in the course of familiar correspondence. High and low, the peer of wit and the pretender to it, vied with one another in the production of them. All alike seem to have reached a dead level of mediocrity. The charade which Johnson made in honour of his friend Dr. Barnard [2] is no better and no worse than scores of

[1] Spence's *Anecdotes* 378.

[2] Boswell's *Life* 4. 195. A specimen of what this sort of thing may be is seen in this epigram of Marmontel's, upon picking up a lady's pen:

> Églé, cette plume est de celles
> Qu'à vos pieds déposa l'Amour,

impromptu verses quoted in Walpole's *Letters* or the *Asylum for Fugitive Pieces.*

Much of this, no doubt, seems trivial. But wherever the spirit of the salon appears, evidence of its presence is seen in the production and general esteem of such trifles: rebuses, anagrams, madrigals, enigmas, charades, and *bouts rimés.* The explanation of it all goes back, perhaps, to the Italian Renaissance, when, as Burckhardt has shown, an epigram could lay the foundation of a scholar's celebrity:

> It was held the greatest of all triumphs when an epigram was mistaken for a genuine copy from some old marble or when it was so good that all Italy learned it by heart, as happened in the case of some of Bembo's.

The popularity of epigrams in fine English society is amusingly illustrated by the entertainments provided by a certain Mrs. (afterwards Lady) Miller at her villa near Bath. The character and the results of her attempt to stimulate the production of literature are typical, and, as they have left a considerable record in print, it may be profitable to consider them somewhat at length. She introduced what she was pleased to term the 'little Gallic institution' of *bouts rimés.* Lists of riming words were distributed among her guests, who composed verses suggested by them, employing them in their given order. The resulting effusions

> Quand ce Dieu, fixé sans retour,
> Vous laissa lui couper les ailes.
>
> Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges* 1. 30.

were then placed in a vase decorated with laurel branches and pink ribbons, erected upon a 'modern altar.' 'It is at present,' writes this ingenious lady, 'the receptacle of all the contending poetical morsels which every other Thursday (formerly Friday) are drawn out of it indiscriminately, and read aloud by the gentlemen present, each in his turn. Their particular merits are afterwards discussed by them, and prizes assigned to three out of the whole that appear to be the most deserving. Their authors are then, and not before, called for, who seldom fail to be *announced* either by themselves, or, if absent, by their friends. Then the prize poems are read aloud a second time to the company, each by its author, if present, if not, by other Gentlemen, and wreaths of Myrtle presented publicly by the Institutress[1] to each successful writer.'

When these verses were published they roused, i not the general esteem which the Institutress plainly expected for them, the interest of Miss Burney, the curiosity of Boswell, and the mirth of Walpole. The latter wrote, in his most delightful mood, to the Countess of Ailesbury:

> You must know, Madam, that near Bath is erected a new Parnassus, composed of three laurels, a myrtle-tree, a weeping-willow, and a view of the Avon, which has been new christened Helicon. Ten years ago

[1] 'Institutress' is Mrs. Miller's unpretending designation of herself. The quotation is from the preface to a volume entitled, *Poetical Amusements at a Villa near Bath*, Bath 1775.

there lived a Madam Riggs, an old rough humourist who passed for a wit; her daughter, who passed for nothing, married to a Captain Miller, full of good-natured officiousness. These good folks were friends of Miss Rich, who carried me to dine with them at Bath-Easton, now Pindus. They caught a little of what was then called taste, built and planted, and begot children, till the whole caravan were forced to go abroad to retrieve. Alas! Mrs. Miller is returned a beauty, a genius, a Sappho, a tenth Muse, as romantic as Mademoiselle Scudéri, and as sophisticated as Mrs. Vesey. The Captain's fingers are loaded with cameos, his tongue runs over with *virtù*, and that both may contribute to the improvement of their own country, they have introduced *bouts-rimés* as a new discovery. They hold a Parnassus fair every Thursday, give out rhymes and themes, and all the flux of quality at Bath contend for the prizes. A Roman vase dressed with pink ribbons and myrtles receives the poetry, which is drawn out every festival; six judges of these Olympic games retire and select the brightest compositions, which the respective successful acknowledge, kneel to Mrs. Calliope Miller, kiss her fat hand, and are crowned by it with myrtle, with — I don't know what. You may think this is fiction or exaggeration. Be dumb, unbelievers! The collection is printed, published. — Yes, on my faith! There are *bouts-rimés* on a buttered muffin, made by her Grace the Duchess of Northumberland; receipts to make them by Corydon the venerable, *alias* George Pitt; others very pretty by Lord Palmerston; some by Lord Carlisle: many by Mrs. Miller herself, that have no fault but wanting metre: and immortality promised to her without end or measure.[1]

Mrs. Miller's Institution appears, however, to have been an unqualified social success. The first edition of

[1] Walpole's *Letters* 9. 134; 15 January 1775.

the verses was exhausted in ten days,[1] and a second was published in the following year. Three similar volumes appeared at intervals,[2] and the series was terminated only by the death of the Institutress.[3] The publications received the compliment of an anonymous attack entitled *Sappho*,[4] in which Mrs. Miller was satirically hailed as 'Mistress of the tuneful nine'; but a more deadly assault took the form of a solemn congratulatory *Epistle to Mrs. Miller*,[5] in which that lady is said to

> Shine unmatched in old or modern time,
> A friend of Genius, Pleasure, Taste and Rhime,
> Which daily thrive beneath thy fostering hand
> And pour the tide of learning o'er the land.

An examination of the volume published in 1775 hardly seems to bear out these statements. The following production of the hostess herself it is difficult to describe with accuracy, for the word verse hardly seems appropriate to it:

> From Castor and Pollux, those twins of renown,
> Arose the great dance taught at Lacedæmon;
> Then a son of Achilles, with a barbarous name,
> Taught his soldiers to dance, those Cretans of fame.
> Wise philosopher Socrates also would know,
> From Aspasia the fair how to well point a toe.
> Pompous nuptials and feasts — e'en the grave Funerals
> Was danc'd at by princes, priests, people and all.

[1] See the preface to the volume for 1777. [2] 1776; 1777; 1781.
[3] In 1781; a fifth volume had been announced for 1782.
[4] London 1777. [5] Bath 1776.

It is only fair to say that the verses in the volume do frequently rise from this level to that of mediocrity. The following specimen of *bouts rimés* may serve to indicate the type and contents of the volume:

Hard to my muse it is, I must confess,
In six fixed rhymes aught witty to express;
Why did I mix with Wits? who must detest
And crush my follies which their sense molest.
Thus the poor mole, who rises into light
Dies when he meets the sun's refulgent might.

There are other things to be said in amelioration of the harsh judgments one is inclined to pass upon Mrs. Miller. The later volumes are certainly less bad than the first. The praise of Mrs. Miller, which had formed the staple of the first volume, is somewhat mitigated in the others, and the names of the contributors occasionally emerge into the borderland of fame. Potter, William Hayley, Anna Seward, and Christopher Anstey are worthy of respect, and a poem by Garrick, though worthless, lends a certain distinction to the second volume. Anstey's poem, *An Election Ball*,[1] which enjoyed something of the popularity of his *New Bath Guide*, was written upon a subject given out by Mrs. Miller, 'The ancient and modern Dress and Manners of the English Nation compared'; and the *Poetical Address* which prefaced it is addressed to Mr. Miller. In the former 'Clio' and the Tusculan 'vause' are celebrated, and in the latter the 'myrtle sprigs'

[1] Bath 1776.

and 'vocal swans of Bath.' These poems are still readable.

To Mrs. Miller must certainly be allowed the merit of having gathered about herself a group of persons who would have made the reputation of any London drawing-room. Her own inability to produce anything that should have more than the external appearance of verse does not seem to have repelled those of higher ability and finer taste. For such a woman it was in the nature of an achievement that her Institution lasted six years; and the four volumes of so-called poetical contributions to it retain a certain melancholy interest as showing the result of a deliberate attempt by the world of fashion to stimulate the production of poetry.

CHAPTER VII

The Bluestocking Club

The list of bluestocking ladies given by Hannah More in her poem, *Bas Bleu*, is as follows: 'Vesey of verse the judge and friend,' 'Boscawen sage,' 'bright Montagu,' and Elizabeth Carter. To this we should of course add the name of Miss More herself. The men enumerated as members are Lord Lyttelton, Pultney, Earl of Bath, and Horace Walpole. Exactly the same list is given by Forbes in his *Life of Beattie*, save that he adds the name of Stillingfleet. Miss More mentions certain famous men as former habitués of the blue drawing-room, Garrick, Mason, Dr. Johnson, Burke ('apostate now from social wit'), and Sir William Pepys. These five, with the exception of Pepys, are thought of rather as frequent visitors than as recognized members.

We must not assume from the use of the word *club* the existence of a formally established society, like the great Literary Club, with rules and election of members. The blues were drawn together simply by the desire for mutual intercourse, and the group expanded freely as fit associates appeared. No exact list of bluestockings can therefore be made. Indeed, the list of ladies in Hannah More's *Sensibility*, described as

participating in 'the charm of friendship and the feast of sense,' is somewhat different from the one already quoted: Mrs. Boscawen, Mrs. Carter, Mrs. Montagu, Mrs. Chapone, Mrs. Walsingham, Mrs. Delany, and Mrs. Barbauld. Fanny Burney, like Miss More herself, is thought of as a younger member,[1] almost as a protégée of the club. Mrs. Thrale, with her own coterie, was always more or less of an outsider, as was also Mrs. Ord. Later, as we shall see, the name *bluestocking* came to be applied to women who had only the remotest connection with the original group.

The origin of the little company which was to develop into the *Bas Bleu* is now difficult to discover. Miss More's poem in praise of it did not appear until 1786, many years after its fame was fully established. The verses, begun in 1783, circulated for many months in manuscript and frequently retouched, are the official handbook of the society; but it is necessary to remember that the author did not come into contact with the group during its earlier history, and that her account of its origin is therefore not to be taken as indubitable evidence. She divides the honour of having instituted the bluestocking *conversazioni* between Mrs. Montagu and Mrs. Boscawen. Madame D'Arblay, on the other hand, assigns it exclusively to Mrs. Vesey.[2] In any case, it is certain that Mrs. Montagu speedily became the leading person in the club, for Lyttelton, apparently

[1] She calls herself a bluestocking in 1780. *Diary* 1. 403.

[2] *Memoirs of Dr. Burney* 2. 262.

as early as 1765,[1] refers to her as 'la belle présidente.' The earliest meetings may well have occurred at her literary breakfasts, which have been already described.[2] It is not unreasonable to assume that the 'club' was already in existence during the later fifties, for it was well known to Admiral Boscawen, who died in 1761. A prominent member of it, mentioned by Miss More, was the Earl of Bath, who died in 1764. But the Bas Bleu did not attain the meridian of its fame till many years later.

From its very beginning the object of the club was to promote literary conversation as the chief pleasure of social life. That such conversation was a stiff and solemn business one hardly needs to be told. Bluestocking letters alone are a sufficient proof of it. In the *Bas Bleu* we hear much of the false wit of the Hôtel de Rambouillet,

> Where wit and point and equivoque
> Distorted every word they spoke.

The English bluestockings will have none of this. They repudiate wit that is French and wit that is tainted, and exalt common sense in its stead. Hannah More declares that the solid basis of conversation is learning; it is for conversation, she cries, that

> The sage consumes his midnight toil;
> And keeps his vigils to produce
> Materials for thy future use.

[1] See below, p. 140.

[2] See above, p. 105.

Such praise of serious conversation enables us to guess at the preparation which earnest souls made for the *conversazioni* in which they hoped to shine. To Lady Louisa Stuart the group at Mrs. Montagu's had about it a suspicion of acting before an audience. 'If you had good luck,' she says, 'you might not only be greatly amused at Mrs. Montagu's, but carry away much that was well worth remembering. But then, also, the circular form is not less convenient to prosers and people who love to hear themselves talk, so you might, on the contrary, come in for the most tiresome dissertations, the dullest long stories, the flattest jokes anywhere to be found.'[1] Lyttelton himself gave similar testimony. Fanny Burney's words seem to show that the bluestockings were occasionally bored with themselves: 'I respect and esteem them,' she writes in April 1784, 'but they require an exertion to which I am not always inclined.' There is, moreover, the indirect evidence afforded by Boswell. The greatest judge of conversation then living had been repeatedly in the presence of the bluestockings; he never wearied of expressing his admiration for them; he had watched them swarming about his master; he had taken the trouble to investigate the origin of their society; but he never thought it worth while to record their talk.

Much of the fame of the bluestockings was due to the name by which they had come to be known. It

[1] Cf. the whole passage. Home's *Lady Louisa Stuart*, pp. 159–60.

caught the public attention quickly, and has remained a useful addition to the English vocabulary. The word *bluestocking* presents an interesting but perhaps insoluble problem in etymology, or rather in slang. Various explanations of the term exist, but, though they are not irreconcilable, they are not wholly satisfactory. It would seem as though a source ought to be found in seventeenth century France or sixteenth century Italy[1]; but none has yet come to light. Mills in his *History of Chivalry*[2] (1825) traces the word back to the Society 'de la Calza,' founded in Venice in the year 1400. The society lasted till 1590, when, he continues, 'the rejected title' — by which presumably he means *calza turchina*, though he nowhere mentions it — 'crossed the Alps, and found a congenial soil in the flippancy and literary triflings of Parisian society. . . . It diverged from France to England.' No evidence for the remarkable migrations of this title is adduced by Mills. The words *bas bleu* are unknown to French lexicographers save as a translation of the English bluestocking;[3] so that Mills's

[1] An Italian equivalent for bluestocking is unknown to Tomaseo and Bellini. In a pamphlet, entitled *Pursuits of Literature*, printed in 1797, T. J. Mathias gives the term *calza azzurra* as though from Ariosto, quoting,

> Fortunata la Calza azzurra e d' oro
> Si grate a Febo e al santo Aonio coro.

The first line quoted, however, is not by Ariosto at all, but by Mathias himself. Cf. *Orlando Furioso*, ed. Papini, canto 46, st. 3.

[2] 1. 379 ff.

[3] Larousse, *Grande Encyclopédie*.

statements respecting the peregrinations of the term seem to be the result of his own imagination.[1]

On the other hand, when we turn to English literature, we find that the term was used as early as the seventeenth century. The first occurrence of it noted by Murray, in the *New English Dictionary*, is in Bramston's *Autobiography* (1683), in reference to the Little Parliament of 1653: 'That Blew-stocking Parliament.' It is here plainly used as a sneer at the unostentatious dress of the Puritans, who eschewed silk stockings. Reference to coarse or ugly stockings had been a well-known form of abuse for years. Prince Hal makes use of a similar term, 'puke-stocking' — puke being a kind of bluish-black woollen, not worn by courtiers — in sneering at the keeper of the Boar's Head tavern.[2] The word *bluestocking*, even after its application to literary ladies, retained something of a derogatory flavour; it was considered by some a term of reproach,[3] and was bitterly resented.

Just when the term was first applied to literary ladies, it is difficult to say;[4] the period of its great

[1] Mills's explanation of the word was adopted (without acknowledgment) by Dr. Brewer in his *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, and has therefore had considerable currency. It has been recently repeated, notably in the *Quarterly Review* for January 1903, in an article entitled 'The Queen of the Bluestockings,' by an anonymous writer, and in Mrs. Gaussen's *A Later Pepys*.

[2] *King Henry IV, Part I*, Act 2, scene iv.

[3] Home's *Lady Louisa Stuart*, p. 156; cf. the *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 4. 65.

[4] The following quotation from Mrs. Montagu's *Letters* (4. 117) has been cited (notably in the *New English Dictionary* and in Hill's edition of Boswell's

popularity was in the decade of the 80's. By that time it had caught the attention and roused the curiosity of Boswell, who gives the following explanation of it:

About this time [1781] it was much the fashion for several ladies to have evening assemblies, where the fair sex might participate in conversation with literary and ingenious men, animated by a desire to please. These societies were denominated Blue-stocking Clubs, the origin of which title being little known, it may be worth while to relate it. One of the most eminent members of those societies, when they first commenced, was Mr. Stillingfleet, whose dress was remarkably grave, and in particular it was observed, that he wore blue stockings. Such was the excellence of his conversation, that his absence was felt as so great a loss that it used to be said, 'We can do nothing without the *blue stockings*,' and thus by degrees the title was established.[1]

Forbes, in his *Life of Beattie*, throws new light on the matter:

Mr. Stillingfleet, being somewhat of an humourist in his habits and manners, and a little negligent in his dress, literally wore grey stockings, from which circumstance, Admiral Boscawen used, by way of pleas-

Life of Johnson) as showing that the term *bluestocking* was in use as early as March 8, 1757, on which day Mrs. Montagu writes: 'I assure you our philosopher (Mr. Stillingfleet) is so much a man of pleasure, he has left off his old friends and his blue stockings, and is at operas and other gay assemblies every night.' Personally I do not think that this can be regarded as an occurrence of the word *bluestocking* at all. I incline to think that Mrs. Montagu means no more than she literally says, that Mr. Stillingfleet has left off the homely garb for which he was noted. But, in any case, it is interesting as a reference to the fame of his stockings, and tends to support Boswell's explanation of the term.

[1] *Life* 4. 108.

antry, to call them the 'Blue-Stocking Society,' as if to indicate that when these brilliant friends met, it was not for the purpose of forming a dressed assembly. A foreigner of distinction, hearing the expression, translated it literally, 'Bas Bleu,' by which these meetings came to be afterwards distinguished.[1]

Madame D'Arblay, writing in 1832, asserted that it was Mrs. Vesey who first encouraged Stillingfleet to appear in his homely dress; '"Pho, pho," cried she . . . "don't mind dress! Come in your blue stockings!"'[2] and there seems to be no good reason for rejecting this additional detail. It is at least not inconsistent with the facts already cited.

The 'mistake' made by the 'foreigner of distinction' is plainly referred to in a letter from Mrs. Carter to Mrs. Montagu, in reference to the title *Bas Bleu:* 'Do not you remember last winter that Madame de Montier (or some such name; she was, however, the French Ambassadress) desired somebody to introduce Monsieur — son Mari to the Bas bleu?'[3]

These explanations, which form a fairly consistent series, and which commended themselves to the blue-stockings, ought to be good enough for the twentieth

[1] 1. 210 *n.*; cf. a similar account by Pennington (who remembered the salons) in his *Letters of Mrs. Carter to Mrs. Montagu.*

[2] *Memoirs of Dr. Burney* 2. 262–63. No explanation of the term *blue-stocking* is given in the *Diary.*

[3] *Letters of Mrs. Carter to Mrs. Montagu* 3. 202; 22 September 1783. The occurrence is referred to by Hannah More in the 'Advertisement' prefixed to *Bas Bleu* (1786). The story was apparently reported to the blues by Lady Dartrey. See Pepys's letter to Hannah More, in *A Later Pepys* 2. 235; 13 August 1783.

century. Some, however, insist on a more picturesque interpretation, probably in protest against the implication that the first bluestocking was a man. An explanation first offered in 1861 by Mr. Hayward, in the second edition of his *Autobiography of Mrs. Piozzi*, was given to him by a lady who said she received it from Lady Crewe in the course of a conversation held in 1816. It runs as follows:

> Lady Crewe told me that her mother (Mrs. Greville), the Duchess of Portland, and Mrs. Montagu were the first who began the conversation parties in imitation of the noted one, *temp.* Madame de Sévigné, at Rue St. Honoré. Madame de Polignac, one of the first guests, came in blue silk stockings, then the newest fashion in Paris. Mrs. Greville and all the lady members of Mrs. Montagu's *club*, adopted the *mode*. A foreign gentleman, after spending an evening at Mrs. Montagu's *soirée*, wrote to tell a friend of the charming intellectual party who had one rule; 'they wear blue stockings as a distinction.'

It would hardly be necessary to notice this account at all, were it not that it has been seriously presented in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as the correct explanation, has been cited by an anonymous writer in the *Quarterly Review* (January 1903), and recently repeated with full approval.[1] It must be noticed, in the first place, that Mr. Hayward himself does not accept the story, inasmuch as he banishes it to a footnote, and retains the traditional account in the body of his work. Again, the sole source of his authority is the hearsay

[1] Gaussen's *A Later Pepys* 1. 42.

evidence of an anonymous lady given a century after the fact. We are three stages away from the original informant, without written evidence of any kind until 1816. Moreover, the anecdote bears upon its face all the marks of a story *ben trovato*. Those who can think of Mrs. Montagu and her friends as genially displaying blue stockings as a sort of badge are, to say the least, but ill acquainted with certain nice prejudices of our literary ladies.

It is clear, however, that there was about this phrase that vague yet eloquent connotation which is the peculiar property of slang and in which the explanations given above are, with the exception of the last, conspicuously deficient. In no other way can the sudden popularity of the word be accounted for.[1] The tendency to play with the phrase became evident at once: 'When will you *blue-stocking* yourself and come amongst us?' wrote Walpole to Hannah More.[2] 'You may put on your blue stockings,' wrote Mrs. Chapone to Miss Burney,[3] 'if you have got any boots to walk about in the mornings, I shall like you as well in them.' The word was of course presently reduced to *blue*,[4] partly, no doubt, because of the associations

[1] Those who care to study the playful development of the word may consult the sprightly article, 'Bas bleu,' in the earlier edition of Larousse's *Dictionary*.

[2] *Letters* 13. 217; 13 November 1784.

[3] *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 5. 50; 27 December 1791.

[4] Much earlier certainly than the date (1790) given in the *New English Dictionary*, 'In the evening we had a very strong reinforcement of blues,' wrote Hannah More in March 1783 (Roberts' *Memoirs of More* 1. 275);

of this colour with the salons ever since the Rambouillet days. When Fanny Burney was asked what Johnson called Mrs. Montagu, she replied, '"Queen," to be sure! "Queen of the Blues!"'[1] and at court she was amused at a gentleman who was ashamed to be found 'reading to *a blue*.'[2]

Two facts emerge clearly from these quotations. In the first place, we derive from Mrs. Carter's letter a definite date for the origin of the phrase *bas bleu*, the winter of 1782–3. In the second place, it is obvious that this French phrase and the anecdote connected with it account in large measure for the popularity of the word *bluestocking*. That word had, as we have seen, existed before;[3] indeed the French lady who first used the words *bas bleu* was but trying to translate an English phrase already familiar to her; but it was only when that phrase assumed a kind of international significance by appearing in French form that the English public generally took up the earlier word *bluestocking*. From 1782 onwards the word becomes common. Moreover, it was at the same period that public attention began to be directed to the Bluestocking Club, and the date 1782 may conveniently be taken as marking its florescence.

'There was everything delectable in the blue way,' writes the same author in 1784 in reference to Mrs. Ord's *conversazione* (*Ib.* 1. 317).

[1] *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 2. 236; 9 December 1783.

[2] *Ib.* 4. 66; 1 August 1788.

[3] Cf. Fanny Burney, 'He had no small reverence for us blue-stockings.' *Diary* 1. 403; June 1780.

CHAPTER VIII

The London Salon

The London salon corresponds well enough, in its external aspects, with its Parisian prototype. If we apply the fivefold analysis given in the second chapter of this work, we shall discover no essential difference in method between the two institutions. Differences in result there undoubtedly were, but the two were alike in aim. The London salon, like the Parisian, for example, depended for its influence partly on the beauty and interest of its material surroundings. Mrs. Montagu fascinated her guests with Chinese rooms, Athenian rooms, feather rooms, rooms decorated by Angelica Kauffmann, and other gorgeous apartments in her house in Hill Street and in her palace in Portman Square. Mrs. Vesey, less ambitious and more intimate, entertained her friends in a 'blue-room' or 'green-room,' and often in her little dressing-room which Mrs. Carter called 'the unostentatious receptacle of liberal society' [1] — unostentatious, no doubt, but bizarre and successfully bizarre like everything that Mrs. Vesey touched.

Like the French hostesses, these women kept up in

[1] *A Series of Letters* 4. 218.

their assemblies a tone that was at once aristocratic and literary; they made conversation the chief entertainment of the drawing-room, and the patronage of letters their most elegant aim. Each of them attached to herself — perhaps it would be more proper to say, attached herself to — some writer, who frequently repaid her friendship with tributes in verse. These writers were, in general, women; and the friendships of the London salon are usually, though not always, feminine. They offer, therefore, as we shall see later, a notable contrast to literary friendships in Parisian salons.

Various English women — Mrs. Cholmondeley, Mrs. Crewe, Lady Lucan, Lady Hervey, Mrs. Greville, Mrs. Catherine Macaulay — had studied the Parisian salon at first hand; but none of them were so familiar with it, none so intimately acquainted with various Parisian hostesses, as Mrs. Montagu. As early as 1750 Madame du Bocage visited her in London and took breakfast at her house in Hill Street. The two ladies paid elaborate court to each other. Montagu presented du Bocage with compliments and an edition of Milton, and du Bocage (who was a professed poet) replied with compliments and a string of riming couplets, setting forth the merits of Montagu.[1]

[1] Montaigu, tes dons précieux
M'assurent de ta bienveillance,
Les miens, peu dignes de tes yeux,
Te prouvent mon obéissance.
Ainsi partout on voit les Dieux

Again, when Madame Necker was in England, many years later, Mrs. Montagu saw much of her. The French lady, like every one, was pleased with her amiability, and, again like every one, amused at the stiffness of her conversation.[1] When, in 1775, Mrs. Montagu went to Paris, her associations with the Neckers became fairly intimate. She was presented to 'all the *beaux esprits*,' and was even taken to see Madame Geoffrin, whose glory now was waning. On the sixth of July 1776, she met Madame du Deffand at dinner, and found her gay and lively. Madame du Deffand's comments on the bluestocking, in her letters to Walpole, are singularly indulgent, until corrected by Walpole. She is polite, thinks Madame du Deffand, but not over pedantic,[2] and 'ennuyeuse, sans doute, mais bonne femme.' Mrs. Montagu hired a house at Chaillot, where she gave suppers for Madame du Deffand and

> Recevoir des chants ennuyeux
> Pour les biens que leur main dispense.
> Tes bienfaits me sont plus flatteurs
> Que les trésors de la fortune,
> Toujours aveugle en ses faveurs,
> Elle prodigue les honneurs
> À ceux dont la voix l'importune;
> Mais tes regards doux et perçants
> Du vrai mérite ont la balance;
> Je juge aussi par tes présents
> Qu'ils ont souvent de l'indulgence.
>
> Du Bocage, *Lettres sur l'Angleterre*, p. 50; 25 May 1750.

[1] Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works* 2. 179; 30 September 1776.

[2] *Lettres à Walpole* 3. 243, 256.

the rest. That she flattered them all, after the most approved Parisian fashion, no one who has read her letter to Madame du Deffand can doubt. It is one of the most skilful pieces of compliment which she ever devised, and was sent with a gift of two beautiful scent-boxes. Witness the following extract, and let the reader remember that Madame du Deffand was blind.

Il ne me reste qu'une ressource ; c'est de vous adresser comme à une divinité et vous offrir simplement de l'encens ; c'est le culte le plus pur et le moins téméraire. Je vous prie, madame, de me permettre de vous offrir deux cassolettes, où j'ai mis des aromatiques.[1]

In spite of the success of her Parisian visit, it may be questioned whether Mrs. Montagu was wholly satisfied with the spirit of the salons she visited. She had gone to Paris with the avowed intention of searching, among the provincial nobility, for 'some who are more in the *ton* of Louis XIV's court' [2] than the ladies of Versailles. It was, as one might have suspected, the Rambouillet tradition that attracted her, rather than the later salon with its freer thought and freer manners, and its constant change of favourites. She should have gone to Paris at least as early as the days of Madame de Lambert.

But it is certain that Mrs. Montagu never succeeded in attaining to the ease of the Parisian salon. Friends feared that she would come back more artificial than ever. Mrs. Boscawen wished that she might get by

[1] *Ib.* 3. 383. [2] Forbes's *Life of Beattie* 1. 389; 3 September 1775.

heart Mrs. Chapone's chapter on Simplicity.[1] But there was no such thing as simplicity in Mrs. Montagu's nature: all her instincts were for the elaborate, her methods in all things complicated, her manner grand, not easy. Her assemblies became even larger and more overpowering; the number of 'the Great' grew constantly larger.

Her salon was inevitably the reflection of her own character. She could be, as Mrs. Thrale witnessed, 'brilliant in diamonds, solid in judgment, critical in talk';[2] she could be, as Johnson freely admitted, 'par pluribus . . . variety in one.'[3] But there was a certain stiffness in her character that inevitably communicated itself to her assemblies. Mrs. Chapone, who had every reason to love her, wrote to Pepys that he would always find in her good nature, 'though not accompanied with remarkable softness.'[4] Fanny Burney was from the first rather overwhelmed by her grand manner, and Mrs. Delany found at one of her assemblies 'a formal, formidable circle,' where she had only 'a *whisper* with Mrs. Boscawen, another with Lady Bute, and *a wink* from the Duchess of Portland — *poor diet* for one who loves a plentiful meal of social friendship.'[5] Six years later she was so dazzled by the brilliancy of one of Mrs. Montagu's assemblies that she fled incontinently.

[1] *Correspondence of Mrs. Delany* 5. 165. [2] *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 1. 460.
[3] *Letters* 2. 149; 1 May 1780. [4] *A Later Pepys* 1. 404.
[5] *Correspondence of Mrs. Delany* 4. 204–205.

Lady Louisa Stuart, who evidently did not like Mrs. Montagu, calls attention to another defect. 'There was a deplorable lack . . . of that art of kneading the mass well together, which I have known possessed by women far her inferiors. As her company came in, a heterogeneous medley, so they went out, each individual feeling himself single, isolated, and (to borrow a French phrase) embarrassed with his own person; which might be partly owing to the awkward position of the furniture, the mal-arrangement of tables and chairs. Everything in that house, as if under a spell, was sure to form itself into a circle or semicircle.' [1] But all this is as nothing compared with the testimony of Lord Lyttelton. Mrs. Montagu was destined to receive the unkindest thrust from her own familiar friend. At some time in the decade of the sixties, Lord Lyttelton wrote an elaborate letter to a friend in criticism of the modern wits, whom he proclaimed 'not worth a beadsman's rosary.' The following passage [2] can refer only to Mrs. Montagu:

No one can take more pains than Mrs. M—— to be surrounded with men of wit; she bribes, she pensions, she flatters, gives excellent dinners, is herself a very sensible woman, and of very pleasing manners; not

[1] Home's *Lady Louisa Stuart*, p. 158.

[2] The letter is undated, but, as it refers to the death of Lord Bath, it must be later than 1764. Burke is strangely criticised for 'an intemperate vivacity of genius'; the common charge is made against Garrick that he is himself only on the stage, 'and an actor everywhere else.' Johnson is not mentioned. The palm is given to Lord Chatham among living wits. Lyttelton's *Letters* (1780), pp. 122 ff.

young, indeed, but that is out of the question; — and, in spite of all these encouragements, which, one would think, might make wits spring out of the ground, the conversations of her house are too often critical and pedantic, — something between the dullness and the pertness of learning. They are perfectly chaste, and generally instructive; but a cool and quiet observer would sometimes laugh to see how difficult a matter it is for *la belle Présidente* to give colour and life to her literary circles.

There was, moreover, evidently much of the *femme savante* about Mrs. Montagu. Walpole described her in his most merciless manner as a 'piece of learned nonsense'; she and her friends, he continues, 'vie with one another till they are as unintelligible as the good folks at Babel.' [1] This of course is not fair. When was Walpole ever fair? But it certainly may be taken as evidence that Mrs. Montagu did not hesitate to make a display of her knowledge. She had mastered the art, no doubt, of wearing her learning gracefully, but never that of gracefully dispensing with it. It cumbers her correspondence. With Garrick she must discuss Plautus, Terence, and Molière, with Elizabeth Carter the *Ethics* of Aristotle, with Beattie the Greek dramatists, Ossian, Homer, and the 'wilder Oriental poets.' But the reader has throughout the feeling that the writer is making the best of resources that are somewhat limited and undisciplined. Her knowledge of the classics was at best amateurish.

But this deficiency — if such it be — was not fatal.

[1] *Letters* 11. 366 and 368; 9 and 14 January 1781.

The learning of a professional scholar is by no means essential in the mistress of a salon. It may, indeed, as I have already shown, prove a serious obstacle to her success; for the means by which she diffuses her influence are of a totally different sort. With more essential things, high social rank, a large fortune, wit, interest in the course of literature, and a faith in her own power to influence it for good, Mrs. Montagu was richly endowed. Without her there would have been no London salons; for all existed in more or less conscious imitation of hers. She alone succeeded in becoming a patron of letters. To say that she did not equal the great Frenchwomen in this art is merely to say that she was not a genius. She had the power of attracting people of real importance to her drawing-room, and even those who ridiculed her social methods were obliged to admit that they produced an effect. That effect it is difficult to estimate with precision; for it is by no means identical with that which she produced by her own writings or even by her patronage of writers. She has the honour of having assisted in spreading the esteem in which literature and men of letters were held at the close of the century, as opposed to the anomaly of their position fifty years earlier. Her achievement is not the less real because it cannot be exactly calculated.

A far more lovable figure than Mrs. Montagu is her friendly rival, Elizabeth Vesey. Though the

daughter of a bishop, the wife of a Member of Parliament, and mistress of as popular a drawing-room as could be found in London, she was as free from vanity as from pretensions to literary gifts. She never dreamed of shining as a critical essayist; she scribbled no verses. She was a withered old lady with the heart of a child, who amused everybody by her enthusiasm and her naïve manners, which were always a bit slipshod. She was so notoriously informal that her guests forgot their elegant reserve, and became, like her, good-humoured and lively. She moves about her crowded assemblies like a fairy crone, her parchment skin seamed and shrivelled with age, her ear-trumpet dangling from her neck, while she distributes her promiscuous company, pats her guests on the arm, breaks up their cliques, and squares the social circle.[1] She touched every one into good spirits with what Elizabeth Carter called the wave of her fairy wand.[2] Everybody adored her, men and women alike. To Martin Sherlock[3] she was 'good Mrs. Vesey — indeed she is *all* goodness'; and Horace Walpole bursts into momentary enthusiasm,[4] 'What English heart ever excelled hers?'

If she found favour in the eyes of all London, it was not by any charms of person, for at the time of her great fame, she had long since lost every trace of beauty. In 1779, when Miss Burney first met her,

[1] Roberts, *Memoirs of More* 1. 298.
[2] Carter, *Series of Letters* 4. 141.
[3] *Letters on Several Subjects* 2. 166.
[4] *Letters* 14. 5.

she was a very pattern of old age, with 'the most wrinkled, sallow, time-beaten face' ever seen.[1] But her vivid imagination never deserted her, and to the sophisticated people by whom she was surrounded she seemed a sort of ethereal meddler in human affairs. Her friends called her the Sylph.[2] Mrs. Carter could detect nothing mortal in her save a love of London,[3] and felt about her a suspicion of 'coral groves and submarine palaces.'[4] If she was ordered to take fresh-water baths, she must, like a child, make a game of it all, play at being primitive, and rear in imagination an 'American hut' on the banks of the Liffey.[5] She flitted eagerly about England and Ireland, anxious to know everybody and see everything.[6] Mrs. Carter found her like Bartholomew Cokes, who wanted every plaything in the Fair.[7] Indeed, the world must have seemed to Mrs. Vesey a vast toyshop with endless opportunities for play, for she could amuse herself by planning a *fête champêtre*,[8] or by inventing a new tea-pot, lacking, to be sure, both spout and handle, but of 'a beautiful Etruscan form.'[9] Her guests never knew

[1] *Diary* 1. 253.

[2] She was so called by Mrs. Delany as early as 1751. (*Correspondence* 3. 21), who adds, 'The spirits of the air protect her.'

[3] *Letters to Mrs. Montagu* 1. 242.

[4] *Ib.* 1. 330.

[5] *Ib.* 1. 311.

[6] Mrs. Carter writes her (*Series of Letters* 4. 27), 'I prevented you from carrying me to every place you had ever heard of in England or Wales.'

[7] *Letters to Mrs. Montagu* 1. 335, 2. 355; cf. 2. 109.

[8] *Series of Letters* 4. 120.

[9] *Ib.* 4. 137.

what to expect, for she might present them with an atheist philosopher hot from the salons of Paris or set them to cutting out Indian figures and flowers, to paste on her dressing-room windows in imitation of painted glass.[1] Dowagers marvel at her, and lament that oddities are become the fashion.[2]

Her parties were informal to the point of becoming promiscuous. Her first aim was to get together every one of importance,[3] literary, political, social, and ecclesiastical, to keep them broken up into small groups, and to insist on uniting those of different tastes and mood. She got Walpole side by side with Fanny Burney [4] (whom he liked at once), and again side by side with Sir William Jones (whom he did not).[5] She tried to present Dr. Johnson to the Abbé Raynal, and drew from the Great Moralist an immortal refusal.[6] She was apparently even ambitious to marry Elizabeth Carter to Thomas Gray.[7] Yet withal she had the rare gift of self-obliteration.[8] She gave herself no

[1] *Correspondence of Mrs. Delany* 3. 40. [2] *Ib.* 5. 523.

[3] Hannah More writes: 'Tuesday I was at Mrs. Vesey's assembly which was too full to be very pleasant. She dearly loves company; and as she is connected with almost everything that is great in the good sense of the word, she is always sure to have too much.' Roberts's *Memoirs* 1. 278; 29 March 1783.

[4] *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 2. 214; 19 June 1783.

[5] *Letters* 11. 170.

[6] 'Madam, I have read his book, and I have nothing to say to him.' *Series of Letters* 3. 228 *note; Johnsonian Miscellanies* 2. 12 *note.*

[7] *Series of Letters* 3. 255; 21 May 1765.

[8] 'She seemed rather desirous to assemble persons of celebrity and talents under her roof or at her table than assumed or pretended to form one of the

airs. She was by nature absent-minded, and she affected to be more *distraite* than she actually was. When excitedly denouncing second marriages she could quite overlook (or *seem* to overlook) the fact that she herself had been married twice. 'Bless me, my dear! I had quite forgotten it.' Such wit was but ill-understood in salons which had never before witnessed the spectacle of a bluestocking laughing at herself. There is an Irish whimsicality about her remarks. When ill, she could declare that her only happy moment in fourteen days was in a fainting fit, or again that she was in dread of losing seven or eight of her senses.[1] 'It's a very disagreeable thing, I think,' said she to Mr. Cambridge, 'when one has just made an acquaintance with anybody, and likes them, to have them die,' [2] a sentiment that set Fanny Burney to 'grinning irresistibly,' and filliping the macaroon crumbs from her muff to hide her embarrassment. Mrs. Vesey somehow contrived to make even her deafness a source of amusement. When Lady Spencer brought her some silver ears to use instead of trumpets, she promptly tried them on before her guests, and greeted George Cambridge with one of them still clinging to her ear, but as she was moving away from

number herself.' Wraxall's *Historical Memoirs* 1. 103. 'Without attempting to shine herself she had the happy secret of bringing forward talents of every kind, and of diffusing over the society the gentleness of her own character.' Forbes's *Life of Beattie* 1. 209 *n.*

[1] *Letters of Mrs. Carter to Mrs. Montagu* 1. 271 and *A Series of Letters* 3. 292.

[2] *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 2. 234.

him spilled it unaware. Surely this bluestocking is a very human sort.

Those who smiled at her naïveté forgot that it was a quality very near to wisdom. Her conversation, and perhaps her letters,[1] revealed that instinctive knowledge of the human heart which is the peculiar possession of extreme innocence. 'Few people,' she said to Mrs. Carter,[2] who quotes her words with approval — the *imprimatur* of common sense — 'give themselves time to be friends'; and as if she only half understood the century into which she had been born, inquired 'why the head is always so suspicious of the heart.'[3] The wise Carter, whose knowledge was so much more sophisticated, can but honour her for having the simplicity of a little child, though she would like to whip her for having its imprudence.[4] But it was this very simplicity of soul that enabled the good creature to 'accommodate herself so fully to the awkward customs and manners of mere actually existing men and women.' Mrs. Carter finds it 'very surprising,'[5] as does the student, and as did Montagu and

[1] Her letters, with the exception of a lively but rather incoherent note to Hannah More, have not been published. Lord Lyttelton wrote to Garrick: 'You will be charmed (as I am) with the lively colouring and fine touches in the epistolary style of our sylph, joined to the most perfect ease. Mrs. Montagu's letters are superior to her in nothing but force and compass of thought.' Garrick, *Correspondence* 1. 440; 12 October 1771.

[2] *Series of Letters* 4. 6.

[3] *Ib.* 4. 83.

[4] *Ib.* 4. 354.

[5] *Letters to Mrs. Montagu* 1. 335.

all the dowagers, no doubt; but Miss Burney, with her keen observation, saw at once that her skill in selecting guests and her 'address in rendering them easy with one another' was an art that implied 'no mean understanding.'[1] She had sufficient skill to persuade Horace Walpole, who professed to hate her 'Babels,' to come and join the Cophthi,[2] and not to snub them one and all; she had the skill to keep always on good terms with Mrs. Montagu; she could attract the whole Literary Club on alternate Tuesdays, and filled her drawing-room with the most difficult people in England to manage.[3] Yet her methods were always of the simplest, her collations modest though delicate, and her house, though interesting because of its oddity, was hardly an attraction apart from its mistress.

With all the new emotions of sentimentalism and romanticism, Mrs. Vesey was in full sympathy, and she must have done something to popularize these movements among the *beaux esprits* of London. She adored the *Sentimental Journey*. She and Mrs. Carter

[1] *Diary* 1. 253–54.

[2] *Letters* 9. 152; 24 January 1775: 'The Cophthi were an Egyptian race, of whom nobody knows anything but the learned; and thence I gave Mrs. Montagu's academies the name of Coptic.'

[3] Johnson, Walpole, Goldsmith, Burke, Reynolds, Boswell, Garrick, Sterne, General Potemkin, General Paoli, General Oglethorpe, half a dozen bishops, and all the blues were at various times among her guests. Of one of her entertainments, Hannah More wrote: 'She had collected her party from the Baltic to the Po, for there was a Russian nobleman, an Italian virtuoso, and General Paoli.' Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 212.

write each other of the solemn awe of storms at sea, of 'sublime and terrible' Welsh 'prospects,' [1] of dim-lit Gothic cloisters, and the sad note of the owl at set of sun. She loved the poetry of Gray, and even tempted the shy poet into her drawing-room.[2] She was obliged to pass much of her time in Ireland, and on her journeys there and back improved the opportunity of studying the wild scenery of Wales. She writes to Mrs. Carter of her journey through Anglesey and over Penmuenmaur. The story thrilled Mrs. Carter, for she wrote of it to Mrs. Montagu:

> In the midst of her passage through these wild regions, she and Mrs. Hancock [3] were overtaken by a tempest which greatly heightened the sublime and terrible of the scene; and you may guess what a description such an adventure would furnish to an imagination like hers.[4]

Mrs. Vesey, moreover, appears to have been alone among the blues in aspiring to the easier standards of French manners and to the new 'freedom of thought,' though she never really abandoned herself to them. She was one of the ladies who lent diversity to the amatory career of Laurence Sterne; but the flirtation, though feverish enough for a time, either escaped the notice of Mrs. Vesey's precise friends or was, by general consent, hushed up; for it expired at last quite harm-

[1] *Series of Letters* 3. 323. [2] *Ib.* 3. 255.

[3] Her prosaic sister-in-law, whom friends called 'Body,' as they called Vesey 'Mind.'

[4] *Letters to Mrs. Montagu* 1. 358.

lessly and left only a handful of letters as proof of its former vitality. Yorick and this earlier 'Eliza' met, it would appear, in 1762, when Sterne was at the height of his fame, and enjoying the pleasures of metropolitan life for a season. He heard Mrs. Vesey sing; walked twenty paces beside her; felt the 'harmonic vibrations' of a heart truly sentimental, and had no sooner left her than he opened an amatory correspondence with her. He would give one of his cassocks to explain the magic of her personality: 'I believe in my conscience, dear lady, if truth was known, *that you have no inside at all.* That you are graceful, elegant, and desirable, etc., etc. — every common beholder who can stare at you, as a Dutch boor does to the Queen of Sheba, — can easily find out — but that you are sensible, gentle, and tender and from one end to the other of you full of the sweetest tones and modulations require a deeper research. — You are a system of harmonic vibrations — the softest and best attuned of all instruments. — Lord! I would give away my other cassock to touch you.'[1] Tristram Shandy protests that his head is turned.

We may follow them to Ranelagh, where they saunter lackadaisically, indifferent to the crowd and the fireworks, Mrs. Vesey uttering 'gentle, amiable, elegant sentiments in a tone of voice that was originally intended for a Cherub.' But the exposure was apparently too much for the tender frame of Yorick. In

[1] See Melville's *Life and Letters of Sterne* 2. 67 ff.

listening to Mrs. Vesey's voice, he lost his own, and now 'colds, coughs, and catarrhs' have so tied up his tongue that he can no longer whisper loud enough to explain Vesey's effect upon his heart. How often thereafter he was able to becassock himself and sit in the warm blue drawing-room listening to the music, we do not know. The romance did not last long, certainly; and we hear nothing more of it after the autumn of 1767, when Mrs. Vesey invited Sterne to visit her in Ireland, an invitation which his illness compelled him to decline.

Like the French ladies described by Sterne in the *Sentimental Journey*, Mrs. Vesey turned, at a certain age, to agnosticism. Mrs. Montagu had defied Voltaire, but Mrs. Vesey courted the Abbé Raynal. He responded with great vivacity and was often in her drawing-room during the year 1777. Mrs. Boscawen asserts [1] that she once heard him talk for eight hours

[1] *Life of Mrs. Delany* 5. 307. Gibbon wrote of Raynal (*Letters* 2. 75; 30 September 1783): 'His conversation which might be very agreeable, is intolerably loud, peremptory, and insolent; and you could imagine that he alone was the Monarch and legislator of the World.' Walpole, who met him at Baron d'Holbach's, was so bored by his questions that he pretended to be deaf. 'After dinner he found I was not, and never forgave me.' Three years later, however, he dined with Walpole at Strawberry Hill: 'The Abbé Raynal not only looked at nothing himself, but kept talking to the Ambassador the whole time, and would not let him see anything neither. There never was such an impertinent and tiresome old gossip. He said to one of the Frenchmen, we ought to come abroad to make us love our own country. This was before Mr. Churchill, who replied very properly, "Yes we had some Esquimaux here lately, and they liked nothing because they could get no train-oil for breakfast."' *Letters* 9. 92; 12 November 1774, and 10. 62; 15 June 1777.

'successfully' and without interruption: 'One must have *heard and seen it to believe it;*' and Mrs. Chapone asserts that he talked steadily *from one at noon till one* in the morning.[1] This particular conversation, however, did not occur at Mrs. Vesey's. She would never have permitted any one thus to turn conversation into a lecture.

Mrs. Vesey's interest in French agnosticism caused her friends grave concern. Twice Mrs. Carter denounced Voltaire when Mrs. Vesey demanded a pronouncement on his works, and at last wrote that she would as soon think of playing with toads and vipers, as of reading such blasphemy and impiety.[2] She argued for the validity of revealed religion, but without great effect, for Mrs. Vesey continued to play with fire. She produced strange romantic thrills in herself by reading the Abbé Raynal during a violent thunderstorm. Byron, surely, could have understood this, but it was beyond the blues. ''Tis a dangerous amusement to a mind like yours, indeed to any mind,' wrote Mrs. Carter. But dangerous or not, it illustrates the curiosity of Mrs. Vesey's mind, and might furnish a historian of the Romantic Movement with an apt anecdote.

[1] *Posthumous Works* 1. 174. 'In the hour and half I was in his company, he uttered as much as would have made him an agreeable companion for a week, had he allotted time for answers.'

[2] *Series of Letters* 4. 113; cf. 3. 228 and 4. 108. It would appear that Mrs. Montagu feared that Mrs. Vesey was about to adopt certain of Rousseau's 'absurdities.' Cf. *Letters of Mrs. Carter to Mrs. Montagu* 3. 241; 24 June 1785.

Because of the unpretentiousness of her character, Mrs. Vesey has always been ranked far below Mrs. Montagu, but it may be doubted whether the estimate is quite fair. There were many who found her assemblies more agreeable [1] than Mrs. Montagu's more pretentious parties, especially after that lady's removal to Portman Square. Unlike Mrs. Montagu, she made no attempt to produce literature herself (and for this posterity should be grateful); but she appears to have had an instinctive appreciation, not surpassed by the other, of the true function of the salon. For it was the office of the bluestockings neither to reform the whole of London society by giving it a literary tone, nor to bring into existence a new school of authors dominated by their ideals; but rather to keep in motion, by means of social intercourse, the currents of thought, literary and philosophical. A true *conversazione* can create and vitalize a train of ideas, and Mrs. Vesey, with her broad and genial interests, was able to assemble the best representatives of the new ideas, and bring them into contact with society. This, if there be any, is the true office of the bluestocking, an office which Mrs. Vesey discharged with skill and with charm.

About Mrs. Montagu and Mrs. Vesey there revolved other luminaries. Certain of them — Elizabeth Carter,

[1] Hartley writes to W. W. Pepys (20 August 1800), 'Mrs. Vesey's . . . was indeed the most agreeable house for conversation.' Gaussen's *A Later Pepys* 2. 154.

Hester Chapone, Hannah More, and Fanny Burney — though they presided over no salon, achieved an independent reputation as authors, and will therefore be considered in later chapters. Others of them — as Miss Monckton (still remembered for Reynolds's sentimental portrait of her), Lady Lucan, Lady Herries, Mrs. Greville, the admirable Mrs. Cholmondeley (niece of Walpole and friend of Miss Burney), and the sensible Mrs. Walsingham — have left, in general, little more than a name (and an adjective) to posterity. Others, who are more often encountered, demand a brief consideration.

There is, for example, the gracious figure of Mrs. Boscawen,[1] wife of the Admiral, and one of the best-loved women in London. Boswell's compliment to her will be familiar to students of the *Life of Johnson:* 'If it be not presumptuous in me to praise her, I would say that her manners are the most agreeable and her conversation the best of any lady with whom I ever had the happiness to be acquainted.'[2] Miss More described her parties in the words of Madame de Sévigné as 'all daffodil, all rose, all jonquil,' and dwelt on her power to make each of her guests feel that he had been the inmediate object of her attention.[3]

Her reputation was thus always rather social than

[1] Frances Glanville Boscawen (1719?–1805) was the wife of the Hon. Edward Boscawen, Admiral (d. 1761), and mother of Viscount Falmouth and the Duchess of Beaufort.

[2] 3. 331.

[3] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 182; 93.

literary.[1] Her letters, indeed, were highly regarded by her friends, and were sometimes preferred to Mrs. Montagu's — a preference by no means audacious. The repeated comparison with Madame de Sévigné is certainly less happy. Mrs. Boscawen's letters, as preserved in Mrs. Delany's *Autobiography* and the *Memoirs of Hannah More*, have the affectionate intimacy but not the kindling wit and sprightliness which distinguish familiar correspondence at its best. It is sufficient to say of these letters that they have successfully preserved Mrs. Boscawen's pleasant personality.

Mrs. Boscawen emulated Mrs. Montagu as a patron of rising young authors by entering into warm personal relations with Hannah More. They first became intimate when, on the twelfth night of *Percy*, Mrs. Boscawen sent the successful dramatist a wreath of myrtle, laurel, and bay. This stimulated the young lady to an exhibition of that flattery for which she was already famous. In an *Ode to the Hon. Mrs. Boscawen*, Apollo

[1] She did, however, give some assistance to Johnson in the *Lives of the Poets*. 'I have claims,' she writes to Miss More (Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 191), 'upon Dr. Johnson, but as he never knows me when he meets me, they are all stifled in the cradle; for he must know who I am before he can remember that I got him Mr. Spence's manuscripts.' These papers were of great use to Johnson, as he himself remarks (*Lives* 1. xxvii, ed. Hill). Boswell regrets (*Life* 4. 63) that Johnson did not make a more handsome acknowledgment; but Boswell seems to have been unaware of Mrs. Boscawen's connection with the whole transaction. Mrs. Boscawen cannot be serious in what she writes of Johnson's ignorance of her. A conversation with Johnson, in which she took part, is described in the *Life* (4. 98).

himself is made to rebuke Hannah for wearing these floral honours, asserting that it is for Mrs. Boscawen that

> the faithful *myrtle blooms*,
> For her the sage's bay.
> And even thou shalt claim a name
> And challenge some renown;
> Boscawen's friendship is thy fame,
> Her praise thy Laurel Crown.[1]

But the two ladies had only begun their career of compliment. Somewhat later Miss More sent to her patron a bottle of 'otto of roses,' having learned that that lady's organs 'partake the refinement that graces her mind.' This is not the first instance we have encountered of the use of incense in the bluestocking ritual.

Mrs. Boscawen sometimes varied her flowery wreaths of praise with gifts and practical suggestions. When she learns that Miss More has been reading Homer and Tasso, she at once becomes ambitious for an English epic from the pen of a woman. 'Some spark,' she thinks, from these older geniuses, 'will communicate to that train of poetic fire, *qui vous appartient*, and the explosion will ascend in many a brilliant star.'[2] The honourable lady demands and obtains an *Ode on the Marquess of Worcester's Birthday*, into which the author had the sense to weave a compliment to Mrs. Boscawen and to 'Glanvilla,' her estate.[3] Meanwhile the patron

[1] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 129.
[2] *Ib.* 1. 179.
[3] *Ib.* 1. 192.

is weeping her eyes red over *Percy*, circulating copies of Miss More's *Essays*, eliciting praises from friends and *beaux esprits* — all duly forwarded — and rebuking, very gently, the rising authoress for not proclaiming more loudly the greatness of the sex: 'where shall we find a champion if you (armed at all points) desert us?' [1]

Miss More's chief tribute to Mrs. Boscawen, however, was her poem, *Sensibility*, published in 1782, in the form of an epistle to that lady. In rapturous verse Sensibility is hailed as the parent of charity, charm, and many other bluestocking virtues; but, above all, 'tis this that 'gives Boscawen half her power to please.' As the poem furnishes the most convenient statement of Mrs. Boscawen's connection with the group of ladies we are studying, a rather long extract from it must be given:

> Accept, Boscawen! these unpolish'd lays,
> Nor blame too much the verse you cannot praise.
> For you far other bards have wak'd the string,
> Far other bards for you were wont to sing.[2]

[1] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 190.

[2] Mrs. Boscawen was the subject of more than one literary tribute before this. Young's dreary ode, *Resignation*, was addressed to her, on the death of Admiral Boscawen; Mrs. Montagu had taken the widow to the ancient poet for consolation. In this poem she is bidden to 'go forth a moral Amazon, armed with undaunted thought.' Perhaps the last of these poetical tributes was a sonnet (from which a selection is here printed for the first time), by Pye when poet laureate. Writing of her villa at Richmond, once the home of Thomson, the poet Pye says:

> Still Fancy's Train your verdant Paths shall trace,
> Tho' closed her fav'rite Votary's dulcet lay;

HANNAH MORE

From Finden's engraving of the portrait by Opie (1786)

Yet on the gale their parting music steals,
Yet your charm'd ear the loved impression feels;
You heard the lyre of Littleton and Young,
And this a Grace and that a Seraph strung. . . .
Yes, still for you your gentle stars dispense
The charm of friendship and the feast of sense:
Yours is the bliss, and Heav'n no dearer sends,
To call the wisest, brightest, best your friends.
And while to these I raise the votive line,
O let me grateful own these friends are mine:
With Carter trace the wit to Athens known,
Or view in Montagu that wit our own,
Or mark, well pleased Chapone's instructive page
Intent to raise the morals of the age;
Or boast, in Walsingham, the various power
To cheer the lonely, grace the letter'd hour.

Somewhat too much of this.

The story continues in the same strain till long after the publication of Miss More's *Florio* in 1786. It is only necessary to add that it is to Mrs. Boscawen that we owe the painting of Opie's delightful portrait of Miss More.[1] It does more to perpetuate the charm of the

Each wonted Haunt their footsteps still shall grace,
Still Genius thro' your green Retreats shall stray;
For, from the Scene Boscawen loves to grace,
Th' Attendant Muse shall ne'er be long away.

Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 27578.

[1] Mrs. Boscawen chose Opie to paint the portrait, though the subject, she writes (Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 2. 35), 'is worthy of Sir Joshua Reynolds's superior skill; but I can command Opie, and make him alter, or even refaire if we do not like it.' In her reply, Miss More stated that nothing could overcome her natural repugnance to having her portrait taken, but Mrs. Boscawen's wishes which are to her 'such indisputable commands.' The portrait, which was hung in Mrs. Boscawen's dining-room, became so popular that both Walpole and Mrs. Walsingham wished copies of it.

bluestocking ladies than all their congratulatory epistles — in prose or verse.

Mrs. Ord [1] has by modern writers frequently been associated with Mrs. Montagu and Mrs. Vesey as originating the bluestocking *conversazioni*.[2] Just why Mrs. Ord should have been chosen to complete the triad of ladies it is difficult to say. She is not mentioned in Miss More's *Bas Bleu*, in Dr. Burney's verses, or in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. Her name occurs but once, and quite casually, in Walpole's *Letters;* and Johnson writes but once [3] of having been present at her assembly. Even those who describe her parties speak rather of her guests than of herself, and praise her good nature without mentioning her conversation.[4] Her talk was, it appears, considered heavy, so that Miss Burney herself was obliged to admit that it lacked both mirth and instruction, and that she loved Mrs. Ord for her friendliness but not for her brilliancy.

Nevertheless Mrs. Ord was one who early made the experiment of banishing cards and dancing from her

[1] Anne Dillingham Ord (d. 1808) was the widow of William Ord (d. 1766), who had been High Sheriff of Northumberland in 1747. She is often spoken of as 'Mrs. Ord of Queen Anne Street.'

[2] Notably Doran, *Lady of the Last Century*, p. 264, and the *New English Dictionary*, under 'Bluestocking.'

[3] *Letters* 2. 146; cf. 149.

[4] Hannah More and Fanny Burney, *e.g.* Rev. Montagu Pennington (Carter's *Letters to Montagu* 3. 199 *n.*) speaks of her as one 'of whom too much good can hardly be said, and of whom the editor believes it would be impossible to say any ill.'

evening parties and substituting undisturbed conversation as the staple of her entertainment. Like Mrs. Vesey she abhorred formality, and made her guests draw their chairs about a large table in the middle of the room, remarking — and it is one of the few remarks of hers that has been preserved — that a table was the 'best friend to sociable conversation.' [1] Here, apparently, she succeeded in getting the unity without the hard formality of the dreaded circle.[2]

She had, moreover, a skill in the choice of her guests which usually saved her from the charge of assembling crowds indiscriminately.[3] Pepys and Dr. Burney unite in praising her ability to mix her ingredients, and for this the latter pronounces her an excellent cook. Miss More liked her assemblies because there she could have Sir Joshua and Mr. Cambridge all to herself [4] or discuss the relative merits of Pope and Dryden, sitting apart with Mrs. Montagu and Horace Walpole.[5]

Perhaps Mrs. Ord wished to take the place of Mrs. Thrale as the social patron of Fanny Burney. She it was who conducted Fanny to her royal prison at Windsor,[6] who helped to keep her in touch with her

[1] *Early Diary of Frances Burney* 2. 138.

[2] See p. 139.

[3] Not invariably, however, for Hannah More once found such a crowd that she thought herself well off to be 'wedged in with Mr. Smelt, Langton, Ramsay, and Johnson.' Roberts's *Memoirs* 1. 174; 1780.

[4] *Ib.* 1. 274; 7 March 1783.

[5] *Ib.* 1. 317; 1784.

[6] *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 2. 378.

old friends,[1] who showered gifts upon her and carried her to oratorios, and who, when the young woman was worn out by her servitude, put the map of England into the hands of 'her child,' and bade her choose the journey she would take. This trip, which was through southwest England, lasted many weeks, and it was mid-September before the two finally drove out of Bath towards London in Mrs. Ord's coach-and-four.[2] Nor did the services of this 'excellent and maternal' creature stop with this, for the very next year she carried Miss Burney to the 'salubrious hills of Norbury,' and there administered what the Diarist, in a flight of rhetoric worthy of her latest years, called 'the balsamic medicine of social tenderness.' [3] But nothing came of this patronage in the way of literature, so that Mrs. Ord's kindness, though challenging our admiration, adds little to the movement we are tracing.

Another woman closely associated with Miss Burney, and one who profoundly influenced her life, was that venerable relic of the former age, Mary Granville

[1] She once mustered the whole tribe of blues that Fanny might show her old friends that a sojourn at Court had not made her forget them. On this occasion the gathering was exceptionally brilliant, and included Mrs. Montagu, Mrs. Carter, Mrs. Boscawen, Mrs. Chapone, Mrs. Garrick, Reynolds, Langton, and Horace Walpole. At this assembly Miss Burney says that she shall be 'proud to show everybody the just first place she [Mrs. Ord] holds with me, among all that set.' *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 3. 357 (3 January 1788).

[2] *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 5. 33; 1791.

[3] *Ib.* 5. 68.

Delany, whom Burke called 'not only the woman of fashion of the present age, but . . . the highest bred woman in the world.'[1] 'Swift's Mrs. Delany,' they loved to call her, for she had known the great Dean in his latter days. Of the relationship, such as it was, she never tired of talking, and in this she was wise, for it was her chief claim to distinction in literary circles. The woman who could display a sheaf of private letters from Swift and to whom the *Spectator* was 'almost too modern to speak of'[2] was of course worshipped by every bluestocking in London; but she was never quite a blue herself. She did not wish to be. Miss More, it is true, claims her as one of the circle in her poem *Sensibility:*

> Delany too is ours; serenely bright,
> Wisdom's strong ray, and virtue's milder light:
> And she who blessed the friend and graced the lays
> Of poignant Swift, still gilds my social days;
> Long, long protract thy light, O star benign!
> Whose setting beams with milder lustre shine.

But Mrs. Delany seldom allowed her lustre to shine upon the salon, and was anything but mild in her opinion of Mrs. Montagu's assemblies. She was more interested in the Royal Family than in the progress of literature, and despite her early associations, preferred the society of rank to that of genius. She was graciously pleased when Garrick received her friend the

[1] *Correspondence of Mrs. Delany* 5. 12 *n.*

[2] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 285 and 1. 92.

Duchess of Portland and herself '*very respectfully*,' and showed himself 'sensible of the honour' done him.[1] She was vexed that Mason's tepid tragedy, *Elfrida*, should be 'prostituted' by a public performance, and 'the charms of virgins represented by the abandoned nymphs of Drury Lane.' 'Such a poem,' she continues, 'would have been represented in days of yore by the youthful part of the Royal family or those of the first rank. Indeed, in *these* our days (*save our own Royal Family*), it would be difficult to find representatives suited to such virtuous and refined characters.'[2] Such a person, who was for ever protesting that she was in love with the King, the Queen, and the whole Royal Family,[3] was in no position to mediate properly between authors and 'the Great.' Her one conception of serving them was to render them up, a living sacrifice, to the Royal Family, as Miss Burney (who was dazzled by the friend of Swift and the friend of the Queen) discovered to her cost. When Miss Burney hesitated to enter upon her service as Dresser to Queen Charlotte — a post which her intimacy with Mrs. Delany had brought her — it was Mrs. Delany who was 'much mortified' that so flattering a proposal could cause a moment's hesitation.[4]

Mrs. Delany is a significant figure in the history of

[1] *Correspondence of Mrs. Delany* 4. 283; 1770.
[2] *Ib.* 4. 489; 30 December 1772.
[3] *Ib.* 5. 374.
[4] *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 2. 364.

the salon by virtue of the fascination which she exercised through her quondam connection with a great man; but of genuine interest in the salon she had little, and of influence upon the course of literature none at all.

Alone among the literary ladies of the age, Mrs. Thrale has retained the fascination which she exercised in her own time. The fame of the other bluestockings has gone from less to less; but hers has remained constant, if indeed it has not increased. This is of significance, for it shows either that she was more modern than her sisters or more universal. She might consistently have aspired to the title, 'Queen of the Bluestockings,' but she did not even care whether she was reckoned one of them, contenting herself with outwitting them at every point. It was she, for example, who captured the two authors most coveted by the mistresses of the salons, Johnson and Miss Burney, and 'planted' them in her house.[1] Her friendship with the former, though it cannot be shown to have altered the course of his works, gave birth to an admirable series of familiar letters, which Hannah More found 'true letters of friendship which are meant to show kindness rather than wit.'[2] But more important than

[1] A newspaper announced that 'Miss Burney, the sprightly writer of the elegant novel *Evelina*, is now domesticated with Mrs. Thrale, in the same manner that Miss More is with Mrs. Garrick, and Mrs. Carter with Mrs. Montagu.' *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 1. 492; May 1781.

[2] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 2. 100.

such published results was the fame which Johnson lent to Mrs. Thrale by his residence at her home. The nearest approach to the true salon that we find in the eighteenth century in England is the dining-room at Streatham; the spectacle of Johnson there reading aloud from the proof-sheets of the *Lives of the Poets* is in exact accord with the best French traditions of the salon.

In many other respects Mrs. Thrale showed that she was capable of fulfilling the more important functions of a literary hostess. It was she who attempted to direct the genius of Fanny Burney towards the theatre, prevailing upon her to write a comedy. It is true that the resulting play, *The Witlings*, was not thought by Dr. Burney a fit successor to *Evelina*, and was accordingly destroyed; but in the absence of any proof to the contrary and in view of the influence which Mrs. Thrale could bring to bear in the theatrical world through Murphy and others, it is difficult to see why her advice to the young writer was not sound. Sheridan, than whom there was no better judge, gave similar counsel.

Finally, when, after her marriage and departure from England, as Mrs. Piozzi, she printed her *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson*, the value of what she had to tell and her vivacity in telling it enabled her to triumph over a slipshod style and an inaccurate method, and to establish, once for all, her reputation in the literary world, a reputation which the bluestockings were foolish enough to think she had lost for ever.

There is no need here to discuss the anomalies of Mrs. Thrale's character. They have been dwelt on unnecessarily and fruitlessly. She had no illusions about her friends, and least of all about her own importance. She looked out on the world in which she moved, shrewdly and, on the whole, sanely. She knew how to make people happy and how to put the Great at their ease. 'Mrs. Thrale,' says Mr. Seccombe, 'moved among them serene, lively, "a pretty woman still," an exorciser of melancholy, the cheeriest of hostesses, quite unconscious of erudition, gaily spontaneous, the queen of Streatham. Her wayward naturalness made her seem a rose among hot-house flowers. Her innate brightness enabled her, as has been said, to romp with learning and to play blind man's buff with the sages.' In the somewhat stifling atmosphere of salons such a personality is of the very highest worth.

CHAPTER IX

Bluestockings as Authors

Much mischief to the cause of criticism is wrought by the specialists. Investigators in the underworld of forgotten books, to which scholarly competition too frequently drives them, often become so accustomed to the darkness about them that they mistake a glimmer for the glorious light of the upper world, and hasten to inform an inattentive public that the dim by-ways and dark corners of the realm of dead authors are by no means lacking in brilliancy. But such assertions serve rather to darken counsel than to illuminate the world. Enthusiasm for a subject sometimes coexists with a state of delusion about it. It ought to be possible to discover that a forgotten book is readable without trying to convince the public that an acquaintance with it is indispensable to all who pretend to culture.

The works of the bluestockings have all long since sunk into this oblivion. The benevolent reader of them has the feeling which Dante experienced so strongly when he met in hell the souls who had once been famous in a brighter world. These books seem to appeal to the reader to reëstablish something of their former fame, even though this, in its turn, prove to be

but transitory. Who now reads Montagu? To many the question itself will be unintelligible; or will be taken to refer to another; yet in 1770 all the world was reading her. It is hardly too much to say that as a critic she was esteemed almost as highly as Johnson himself. She was known as the woman who had dared to challenge comparison with Lucian, as the defender and even as the 'patroness' of Shakespeare; she was an Eve in the world of critics, an armed Athena who had set her foot on the head of the serpent Voltaire.

Mrs. Montagu's career as a writer began with the composition of three dialogues which were added to Lord Lyttelton's *Dialogues of the Dead* when they appeared in 1760. The works were anonymous; but the news that they were by Mrs. Montagu was soon spread abroad. Many had no doubt inferred her authorship already from the enthusiastic words in which the noble lord spoke of her: 'I shall think,' he says, 'the Public owes me a great Obligation for having excited a Genius so capable of uniting Delight with Instruction, and giving to Knowledge and Virtue those Graces which the Wit of the Age has too often employed all its skill to bestow upon Folly and Vice.' The public did not disappoint the peer. Five editions were called for before 1768.

Mrs. Montagu's dialogues might easily be dismissed by saying that they do not reach the level of Lyttelton's. But if it be required to detect grades of value in work so uniformly flat, we may say that the dialogue between

Mercury and a Modern Fine Lady is the best, as that between Hercules and Cadmus is the worst. They are all well called Dialogues of the Dead, for despite all their inflation, they never once betray any semblance of vitality. Of characterization they are wholly innocent, but not of profundity. Cadmus, for example, gives utterance to this: 'The genuine glory, the proper distinction of the rational Species, arises from the perfection of the mental powers. Courage is apt to be fierce, and Strength is often exerted in acts of Oppression. But Wisdom is the Associate of Justice; It assists her to form equal Laws, to pursue right measures, to correct power, protect weakness, and to unite individuals in a common Interest and general Welfare.' It is amazing the amount of such platitudinizing which the eighteenth century consumed with relish. It is one of the marvels of that marvellous era. The style derived its popularity in part from Johnson, who himself achieved a bare victory over its deadliness by the vivacity of his intellect.

In the dialogue between Mercury and Mrs. Modish, the author was at once less pretentious and in closer touch with her subject. Yet even here her desire to give instruction triumphs over any temptation to depict human nature. Mrs. Modish, the frivolous butterfly, explains the phrase *bon ton* quite as seriously as Mrs. Carter the bluestocking would have done: 'It is — I can never tell you what it is; but I will try to tell you what it is not. In conversation it is not

Wit; in manners it is not Politeness; in behaviour it is not Address; but it is a little like them all. It can only belong to people of a certain rank, who live in a certain manner, with certain persons who have not certain virtues and who have certain Vices, and who inhabit a certain Part of the Town.' This is perhaps the best thing in the dialogues. One great advantage of these works remains to be mentioned. They triumph over the form in which they are written, for they never once remind us of Lucian.

But Mrs. Montagu had yet to achieve her unique distinction. It was nine years later that she delighted the world by appearing as the champion of Shakespeare, redressing his wrongs,[1] and vindicating him from the charges of Voltaire. She published a work somewhat largely entitled, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear, Compared with the Greek and French Dramatic Poets, with some Remarks upon the Misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire.* The attacks upon Shakespeare which Mrs. Montagu felt it incumbent upon herself to answer need no discussion here;[2] it may suffice to say that her defence was more widely read in England than the 'misrepresentations' which called it into being. It was regarded as a standard piece of criticism, and its fame penetrated to France and even to Italy.[3] It is impossible to give adequate

[1] The phrase is from *Bas Bleu.*

[2] See Lounsbury's *Shakespeare and Voltaire,* New York, 1902.

[3] See Walpole's *Letters* 11. 67.

illustrations of the esteem in which the book was held.[1] It conferred upon Mrs. Montagu the reputation of a critic, and gave her an enviable position among English writers for the space of thirty years. In the chorus of praise with which this feeble book was greeted there was but one discordant voice. When Reynolds remarked that Mrs. Montagu's essay did her honour, Dr. Johnson retorted: 'Yes, Sir, it does *her* honour, but it would do nobody else honour. I have indeed, not read it all. But when I take up the end of a web, and find it packthread, I do not expect by looking further to find it embroidery. Sir, I will venture to say, there is not one sentence of true criticism in her book.' [2]

It is to this view that posterity — when it has had any views at all on the subject — has inclined. Professor Huchon naturally deplores it,[3] and builds up a judicious defence of the defence. But the modern reader will probably agree with Mr. Lounsbury that 'it is in many ways one of the most exasperating of books.' Mrs. Montagu's ignorance of the Eliza-

[1] See Lounsbury, *op. cit.*

[2] *Life* 2. 88. As late as 1787, she was thus described in the Epilogue to Thomas Holcroft's play, *Seduction:*

> Say, shall not we, with conscious pride proclaim
> A female critic raised — ev'n Shakespear's Fame!

Towards the end of the century the fame of the book declined. Mrs. Montagu was anonymously attacked by Mathias in his *Pursuits of Literature* (1794). In speaking of commentators on Shakespeare he says (p. 37):

> Nor can I pass Lycisca Montagu,
> Her yelp though feeble, and her sandals *blue.*

[3] *Mrs. Montagu and her Friends,* chapter 2.

bethan era was both profound and extensive. Her conception of Shakespeare's environment may be deduced from the following quotation:

> The songs sung by our bards at feasts and merry-makings were of a very coarse kind: as the people were totally illiterate, and only the better sort could read even their mother tongue, their taste was formed on these compositions. As yet our stage had exhibited only those palpable allegories by which rude unlettered moralists instruct and please the gross and ignorant multitude.[1]

A woman who conceived of Shakespeare as living 'in the dark shades of Gothic barbarism,'[2] and who lamented his lack of 'the admonitions of delicate connoisseurs'[3] had in effect yielded all that the most virulent critic could demand. Mrs. Montagu's enthusiasms seem very pallid after her alarming concessions. She considers Falstaff humorous and Macbeth tragic, and is, in general and as usual, platitudinous. But her continuous apologies and concessions really form the staple of her work. 'She found,' says Lounsbury, 'the speech of Brutus to the people in *Julius Cæsar*, quaint and affected. She exhibited her utter incapacity to comprehend the rhetorical skill of Antony by declaring that the repetition of the epithet "honorable" in his speech was perhaps too frequent. The character of Pistol in the second part of *Henry IV* was too much for her to understand. Following previous critics she found many bombast speeches in the tragedy of *Macbeth*.

[1] *Essay*, p. 19. [2] *Ib.* p. 18. [3] *Ib.* p. 150.

Like her predecessors she unfortunately forgot to particularize them; lapse of time has now made it difficult to discover them.'

One of the features of Mrs. Montagu's *Essay* was a series of comparisons between the Shakespearian drama and the ancient Greek. Here she was indeed on dangerous ground, for she could not read the language of Æschylus. This, however, did not discourage her from expressing herself very decidedly on the characteristics of his art. She pronounces the supernatural element in *The Persians* unfitted to the piece, and finds 'something of a comic and satirical turn' in the ghost of Darius.[1] She asserts that the Eumenides of the Oresteian trilogy 'seem both acting out of their sphere and below their character'; [2] but admits that the whole story 'might be allegorical.' Such indeed she considered very nearly all of Æschylus to be; for she had a peculiar notion that his materials were derived at second-hand 'from the hieroglyphic land of Egypt,' and, though in the grosser times of Greece literally understood by the vulgar, were in more philosophic ages 'again transmuted into allegory.' [3] But it is idle longer to stir this forgotten dust.

A woman truly learned in the classics, whose abiding common sense protected her from the ridicule freely poured out upon bluestockings, was Miss (or, by courtesy, Mrs.) Elizabeth Carter, the spinster of Deal.

[1] *Essay*, p. 161. [2] *Ib.* p. 153. [3] *Ib.* p. 156.

To Mrs. Montagu (patron of letters) she was an indulgent preceptress, a very Pierian source of learning, and much that passed as erudition in the 'female Mæcenas' was in reality derived at second-hand from Mrs. Carter. Mrs. Montagu was never unwilling to sit at the feet of the woman whose reading ranged from Aristotle to Petrarch and from Diodorus Siculus to the *Sorrows of Werther*,[1] who would correspond with her respecting the Newtonian mechanics or the Stoic philosophers.

Mrs. Carter's reputation was made by a translation of the extant works of Epictetus, an elegant quarto put forth in 1758, provided with an introduction and ample notes. The style of the translation is, in a very high degree, chaste and pleasing, and nowhere suggests the line-by-line method of the laborious translator. The introductory essay is an admirable exposition of the Stoic philosophy. The following specimen may show that Mrs. Carter was capable not only of a spirited style, but of geniune critical treatment of her subject:

> About the generality of mankind, the Stoics do not appear to have given themselves any kind of trouble. They seemed to consider all (except the few who were students in the intricacies of a philosophic system) as very little superior to Beasts: and, with great tranquillity, left them to follow the devices of their own ungoverned appetites and passions.

With regard to the value of the book as a translation of Epictetus, it is perhaps sufficient to point out that it was, in its own time, a standard commentary, that it

[1] *Letters to Mrs. Montagu* 3. 251 and 224.

passed into a second edition in 1759, and that it is the basis upon which a subsequent translator has been content to build.[1] It has, moreover, renewed its youth in the recent reprints of popular libraries of the classics.[2]

Mrs. Carter has, therefore, transferred to modern times something of her scholarly fame. Yet she was not a pedant, and never gave herself the airs of a *femme savante*. Johnson (who wrote a Greek epigram in her honour that she might be celebrated in 'as many different languages as Lewis le Grand'[3]) used to say that she could 'make a pudding as well as translate Epictetus from the Greek, and work a handkerchief as well as compose a poem.'[4] He paid her the compliment of receiving two of her essays for the pages of *The Rambler*,[5] and these, though dull, are not more unreadable than the rest of that periodical.

Of her collected poems there were four editions during her own life. But it must be frankly admitted that her reputation as an independent author, though respectable in her own day,[6] has since suffered total extinction. Yet the student may discover in her poems here and there a point of antiquarian interest. For our purpose the volume is significant as containing lyrics to Mrs. Vesey and Mrs. Montagu. Both poems, though

[1] Higginson. [2] 'The Temple Classics' and 'Everyman's Library.'

[3] *Life* 1. 123. [4] *Johnsonian Miscellanies* 2. 11.

[5] Numbers 44 and 100. They were reprinted in the editions of her collected poems.

[6] Young praised her in his poem *Resignation* (Part 2). Like Eve, Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Montagu have 'caused a fall — A fall of fame in man.'

addressed to living ladies, contrive to belong to the Churchyard School and to prolong faint echoes of Gray. Two of the stanzas addressed to Mrs. Vesey are plainly intended to counteract that lady's rationalism, and may be quoted here as a specimen of Mrs. Carter's poetic powers:

> Not for themselves the toiling Artists build;
> Not for himself contrives the studious Sage:
> To distant Views by mystic Force compelled,
> All give the *present* to the *future* age. . . .
>
> Yet check that impious Thought, my gentle Friend,
> Which bounds our Prospects by our fleeting Breath,
> Which hopeless sees unfinished Life descend,
> And ever bars the Prison Gates of Death.[1]

Over the whole volume is cast the shadow of the now-fashionable melancholy, and much is made of the midnight moon, the evening dew, the 'Gothic pile,' and the ivy bower of the bird of night. These are worth mention as showing that Mrs. Carter's interests were not bounded by the school of Pope. Her tastes, like

He institutes a comparison with Addison. But Lord Lyttelton is even bolder: Carter's singing reminds him at times of the angels singing over Bethlehem and at times of Sappho,

> 'Greece shall no more
> Of Lesbian Sappho boast. . . . For the sacred head
> Of Britain's poetess the Virtues twine
> A nobler wreath.'

— *On reading Miss Carter's Poems in Manuscript.* Mr. Smelt told Fanny Burney that he considered Mrs. Carter's *Ode* the best in the language. *Diary* 4. 222.

[1] *Poems on Several Subjects*, 3d edition, 1776, p. 94, 'To Mrs. Vesey.'

Mrs. Vesey's, grew increasingly romantic, and though she detested *Werther* [1] and never doubted that Rousseau was mad,[2] she was always an affectionate believer in Ossian.[3] She felt the new passion for landscape. In thought she accompanies Mrs. Vesey to the cliffs of Snowden,[4] and regrets that Mrs. Montagu cannot ascend the heights of windy Morven.[5] At Eastry she dreams herself back to the worship of Woden.[6] Her interest in Gothic architecture is intense, and she writes about the demolition of old buildings like a disciple of Ruskin: 'It seems to me that when a fair inheritance is transmitted to a family they ought to feel a certain degree of tenderness to the abode of the ancestors from whom it is derived, which ought at least to sink quietly by the silent depredations of time, and not be torn down by the rude hand of human violence.' [7]

This interest in romance enabled her to understand the Celtic imaginings of Mrs. Vesey as her learning and her knowledge of philosophy gave her a control over Mrs. Montagu. Her friendship with the two ladies was unruffled throughout, and she received an annuity of £100 from the latter without any sacrifice of dignity. She never lost her head about anything — least of all

[1] *Letters to Mrs. Montagu* 3. 224.
[2] *Ib.* 3. 180.
[3] *Ib.* 2. 292.
[4] *Series of Letters* 3. 288.
[5] *Letters to Mrs. Montagu* 1. 313.
[6] *Ib.* 3. 276.
[7] *Ib.* 3. 110.

about herself. She was a scholar and had a scholar's love of the classics, yet she was broad enough to know when the age was widening its horizon. In an age of prudes, she dared to like *Tom Jones*. In an age of wits, she appreciated wit, yet had the sense to see that it is a 'squint of the understanding which is mighty apt to set things in a wrong place.' [1] She understood and approved what was best in the salons, but could be happy without any pretensions to a career in them.

Thus her life was passed serenely without social rivalries, without the attempt or desire to follow her ostentatious friends afar, and while escaping the criticism so freely visited upon them, she had the honour of contributing by her quiet, serious, and almost unseen influence to whatever of solid worth they were to achieve.

Intimately associated with Miss Carter was 'the admirable Mrs. Chapone,' who, when Miss Mulso, had been one of Richardson's 'Daughters.' Her two chief works, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* and *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, were the result of bluestocking patronage, and were dedicated to Mrs. Montagu and Mrs. Carter respectively. The former, having seen Mrs. Chapone's letters to a favourite niece, recommended their publication, and assisted in preparing them for the press by correcting them with her 'elegant pen.' [2] The preparation of the second volume was undertaken at the instigation of Mrs. Carter and

[1] *Series of Letters* 4. 112.

[2] Dedication to the *Letters*.

with the approval of Mrs. Montagu; though Mrs. Delany claims the honour of having first put the plan into the author's head.[1]

Mrs. Chapone's *Letters* were supposed to have had an enormous influence on the conduct of young women. According to Hannah More, in *Sensibility*, Chapone 'forms the rising age.' In Samuel Hoole's *Aurelia*, the heroine has a vision of an ideal woman:

> On the plain toilet, with no trophies gay,
> Chapone's instructive volume open lay.

But one is inclined to suspect that this volume belongs to that large class of admonitory works less popular with the young than with their parents and preceptors. The book was put into the hands of every young girl from the Princess Royal downwards. Mrs. Delany considered it next to the Bible as an entertaining and edifying work for youthful females. She advises that not more than six lines of it be read at one sitting, in order that it may be the more deeply impressed on the attention, and thinks that the historical and geographical parts of it should be got by heart. She hopes her grand-niece will read it once a year, until she has a daughter to read it to her.[2] Mrs. Chapone herself smiled at the popularity of the book, and considered its success to be due principally to the patronage of Mrs. Montagu, and in part to the 'world's being so fond of

[1] *Correspondence of Mrs. Delany* 5. 93; 14 January 1775.
[2] *Ib.* 5. 55, 309.

being educated.'[1] It is probable that it was generally used as an antidote to the *Letters* of Chesterfield which appeared about the same time, and had a very different reception.

Mrs. Chapone's *Letters* consist almost entirely of advice; if she ever wanders from this it is to give instruction. She treats in turn of religion, the Bible, the affections, the temper, economy, politeness, geography, and history. It is all admirable, incontrovertible, wholesome, and heavy. It is like oatmeal — an old-fashioned food which should be consumed in quantities by the young, but for which they perversely seem to have no appetite. It will be remembered that when Lydia Languish received an untimely visit from Mrs. Malaprop, she wished to be found reading Mrs. Chapone; though her interests were more seriously engaged by works less uplifting. Of literary quality in these *Letters* one can hardly speak, for it is difficult to diffuse literary quality through two hundred pages of solid advice.

The contents of Mrs. Chapone's second volume are hardly different. There are essays ('Affectation and Simplicity'; 'Conversation'), but they are in the same hortatory strain as the *Letters*. There are poems — fortunately few — several of which are addressed to Elizabeth Carter. They are, in general, like that lady's poems, save that they reveal the influence of Collins rather than of Gray.

[1] *Posthumous Works of Mrs. Chapone* 1. 163.

The most interesting things Mrs. Chapone wrote were her familiar letters.[1] They contain many interesting remarks on Richardson, and Johnson, both of whom were personally known to the author. They have an independence, an ease, and a vivacity that are quite lacking in the more solemn productions. The reader of them may find it in his heart to regret that Mrs. Chapone was so filled with a sense of the earnestness of life and of the importance of piety. A long indulgence in frivolity might have saved her.

Miss Hannah More had larger ambitions and more varied talents than the other bluestocking authors. She wrote poems lyrical, occasional, and narrative; she wrote dramas tragic, classical, and sacred; and she wrote essays and critiques of conduct. In all her earlier work she was assisted and inspired by the bluestockings. She was their chosen poet. She represented them in print as Mrs. Montagu represented them in the salon. She celebrated them all in verse, and dedicated in turn to Mrs. Boscawen, Mrs. Montagu, and Mrs. Vesey. It is with this earlier period of her career that we are exclusively concerned; the voluminous works which the lady produced after her separation from the bluestockings form no proper part of our inquiry.

Miss More's relations with the bluestockings began

[1] Her letters to Pepys, printed by Mrs. Gaussen, in *A Later Pepys*, are not so interesting. There is a charming note to Fanny Burney in the *Diary* 5. 50.

in 1774, soon after her arrival in London. The exact date of her first visit to the metropolis is uncertain. Her biographer, Roberts, who seldom gives himself any concern with dates, says that this took place in '1773 or 4'; but inasmuch as Miss More dedicated her *Inflexible Captive* to Mrs. Boscawen as early as March 1, 1774, the former date would appear the more probable. Her introduction to the *literati* was due to Garrick, whose interest in Miss More had been roused by her description of his acting in *Lear*.[1] By 1775 Hannah More was a recognized member of the circle that surrounded Mrs. Montagu. Her poems, *Bas Bleu* and *Sensibility*, which have been noticed elsewhere in this book, were composed directly in their honour; but works of a more public appeal created no less enthusiasm among these ladies. Thus her ballad, *Sir Eldred of the Bower*, which appeared in 1775, was greeted by Mrs. Montagu in her most extravagant manner. She admired 'the spirit and fire of the gothic character' in the tale; the simplicity of the plot, the depiction of ancient manners (save the mark!), the primitive sentiments, and the characterization — all these challenged the critical approval of Mrs. Montagu. The tale of *The Bleeding Rock*, in the same volume, she esteemed no less highly. 'Your Rock,' she wrote, 'will stand unimpaired by ages as eminent as any in the Grecian Parnassus.'[2] Such was the measure of bluestocking praise.

[1] Roberts's *Memoirs of Hannah More* 1. 47.

[2] *Ib.* 1. 60.

But the poems had a sanction more important than this. They were read by a larger circle, Reynolds, Garrick, and Johnson; they became the 'theme of conversation in all polite circles.' Johnson could repeat all the best stanzas by heart.[1] He read both poems with the author, made some alterations in *Sir Eldred*, and even — as was his custom with poems submitted to his judgment — added certain lines to it.[2]

The poems belong to the Gothic school, and may well have been suggested by Percy's *Reliques;* Johnson's interest in them would be hard to understand were they not the production of a woman whom he playfully termed 'the most powerful versificatrix' in the language. But the bluestockings loved romance [3] and the primitive world to which they thought it introduced them. The fact that this world, as conceived by Hannah More, has no remote similarity to our own made it only the more conformable to bluestocking standards of the antique. In reading this lady's poems and plays one is constantly reminded of those still-popular engravings of the eighteenth century, in which distressed virgins, in carefully studied poses, cast their melting eyes up to heaven. They live in bowers; refer to themselves in the third person, as the 'sad Elwina' and 'the distressed Julia'; and when disappointed in love, or (to speak in their own idiom) when their flame is not reciprocated, immediately go mad,

[1] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 63.

[2] *Ib.* 1. 64. [3] See above, pp. 147 ff.; 175.

and after a painful scene before the footlights complete their career by sudden death. Their lovers are of sterner stuff. They seek wars in distant climes, disappear for long periods of time, and are reckoned dead, only to reappear just as some domestic tragedy is reaching its climax; they are for ever drawing their swords — frequently to plunge them into their own bosoms. Miss More made full use of the poetic license which governs this pasteboard world. Her characters are burdened with no human motives, and it is idle to seek for related cause and effect in their conduct. But morality flourishes. Thus in *Sir Eldred* we learn the dangers of jealousy:

> The deadliest wounds with which we bleed
> Our crimes alone inflict;
> Man's *mercies* from God's hand proceed,
> His *miseries* from his *own.*

But as the hero never once in the course of the poem acted like a human being, the force of the moral is somewhat impaired.

In 1777 Miss More essayed a higher flight. She had written dramas in her school-teaching days,[1] and now, with the assistance of Garrick, produced a romantic tragedy, entitled *Percy.* Its title, if not its contents, indicates the influence of Home's *Douglas.* The situation in this play, venerable in romance, deals with two rival houses, those of Percy and Douglas, a heroine forced into an unwilling marriage with the

[1] Notably the *Inflexible Captive,* based on the story of Regulus.

rival of her lover, who has been killed in the Crusades. The distressed heroine and the returned lover (who had not really been killed) meet in a garden-bower:[1]

Percy. Am I awake? Is that Elwina's voice?
Elwina. Percy, thou most adored — and most deceived!
If ever fortitude sustained thy soul,
When vulgar minds have sunk beneath the stroke,
Let thy imperial spirit now support thee. —
If thou canst be so wondrous merciful,
Do not, O do not curse me! — but thou wilt,
Thou must — for I have done a dreadful deed,
A deed of wild despair, a deed of horror.
I am, I am —
Percy Speak, say, what art thou?
Elwina. Married.
Percy. Oh!

It is unnecessary to follow the course of the tragedy; for the reader's own imagination will suggest it.

The play was a success in every way. It ran for twenty-one nights. No tragedy for years had been so successful. Mrs. Barry was at her finest in the mad-scene at the end. The author made nearly six hundred pounds.[2] The play was translated into German, and acted with success in Vienna. The bluestockings were triumphant. Mrs. Montagu appeared repeatedly in her box at Covent Garden. Mrs. Boscawen, who could carry Duchesses to the theatre with her, sent the author

[1] Act III.

[2] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 140.

a wreath of bay.[1] Mrs. Delany invited her to dinner. Garrick, who had written the prologue, introduced her to Home, thus presenting 'Percy to the Douglas.'[2]

In *Percy* Miss More reached the summit of her early achievement, and the book is still sought by collectors. Readers, if in an indulgent mood, will perhaps agree with Walpole, who found the play better than he expected, and, though devoid of nature, not lacking in good situations.[3] Severer folk will side with Mrs. Thrale, who considered it foolish, and thought Fanny Burney ought to be whipped if she did not write a better.[4] The truth probably lies between the two opinions. To the eighteenth century the piece certainly seemed to have merit. At any rate, it was popular enough to be revived in order that Mrs. Siddons might appear as Elwina. Had it survived to the mid-nineteenth century it might have proved useful as a libretto for Bellini or Donizetti. In the coloratura woes of the modern *diva*, the distressed Elwina would have found her perfect interpretation.

Garrick was so pleased with the success of *Percy* that he urged Miss More to write another tragedy. The result was *The Fatal Falsehood*, a romantic tragedy of the same sort. It was acted late in the spring of 1779, some months after the death of Garrick, and, though it did not duplicate the success of the earlier

[1] *Ib.* See above, p. 155. [2] Roberts 1. 130.
[3] *Letters* 10. 166–67; 11 December 1777.
[4] *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 1. 148 (1778).

play, was enthusiastically received. With its production Miss More's connection with the London stage came to an end.[1]

The Fatal Falsehood sinks far below the level of *Percy*. It probably suffered from the lack of Garrick's revising hand; though it is doubtful if even his genius could have introduced any semblance of reality into a series of situations so preposterous. Miss More is usually content to depend upon accident as the source of her dramatic effects; but in *The Fatal Falsehood* she attempted to depict in Bertrand a villain as subtle as Iago. Although he analyzes himself and his motives in a series of soliloquies, he remains a tangle of absurdities, and all the action of the piece, which flows from him, must be similarly described.

Miss More's dramas, as well as her poems and essays, were intended to serve the cause of virtue, about which all bluestockings were seriously concerned. Even the plays are filled with a sort of portable morality in the shape of maxims:

> The treacherous path that leads to guilty deeds
> Is, to make vice familiar to the mind.

Miss More never escaped from the office of preceptress; the forming spirit of all her work is that of the Young Ladies' Academy.

In the same year which saw the production of *Percy*,

[1] The 'sacred' dramas, *Moses in the Bulrushes*, *David and Goliath*, *Belshazzar*, and *Daniel*, escaped the contamination of the stage.

she put forth a volume entitled *Essays on Several Subjects, principally intended for Young Ladies.* The book is of the same sort as Mrs. Chapone's *Letters:* it warns young women to be modest, to avoid envy, and guard against the 'obliquities of fraud' in lovers. Allowing for its hopelessly narrow view of life, it may be granted that the advice is sound enough. But the bluestockings never realize that good advice is the cheapest commodity in the world.

Florio, a tale somewhat inappropriately dedicated to Walpole, is a sort of parable in verse, designed to enforce such lessons as are conveyed in the *Essays.* The hero, once a slave to frivolous society, is converted by reading Johnson's *Idler* and inspecting the beauties of Nature under the direction of his mistress.

With *Florio* we reach a period in Miss More's literary career and the end of what may be called the bluestocking influence on her work. Her pietism, which had amused Garrick, was now becoming chronic. She declined to go and see Mrs. Siddons as Elwina, because it is wrong to attend the theatre. She deplored the singing, dancing, and feasting in which London indulged after King George's recovery of his sanity.[1] She even objected to the phrase *merry Christmas*, as being bacchanalian rather than Christian.[2] Walpole, who was naturally distressed by all this, made a charming attack on Miss More's Low Church faith in the Ten Commandments, and pointed out to

[1] Roberts 2. 153. [2] *Ib.* 1. 191.

her that she was guilty of the Puritanical heresy.[1] The truth is that Miss More's sense of responsibility to society at large was weighing on her mind. In 1788 she published a serious call to a more solemn view of life in her *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society*, and definitely embarked upon her career as preceptress in public morality. Meanwhile she was drawing steadily away from her fashionable friends. At last she came to think any association with them almost wicked. On March 12, 1794, she wrote in her diary:

> Dined with friends at Mrs. ——. What dost thou here, Elijah? Felt too much pleased at the pleasure expressed by so many accomplished friends on seeing me again. Keep me from contagion![2]

Whatever may have been the influence of the blue-stockings upon others, there can be no doubt that for Hannah More it had been an excellent corrective. It had at least prevented her from comparing herself to Elijah.

[1] Roberts 2. 111. [2] *Ib.* 2. 415.

CHAPTER X

Mrs. Montagu as a Patron of the Arts

Above all things Mrs. Montagu longed to send her reputation down to posterity as an acknowledged patron of letters. She wished to attach to herself, after the manner of the French literary ladies, some poet, essayist, or scholar, whose work she might inspire and supervise, and whose reward was to be the association of her name with his. Hannah More, recognizing this ambition, calls her 'the female Mæcenas of Hill Street,' [1] and Dr. Burney asserts that she 'makes each rising art her care.' [2] The poet for whom she had been waiting appeared in the summer of 1766, in the person of James Beattie, a young professor of moral philosophy at Aberdeen, who was, at the time, unknown in England.

Beattie was by nature shy, nervous, self-conscious, and uncertain of his powers — a type familiar in the academic world. He was for ever finding his poems unworthy of him, suppressing them, altering and correcting them, and threatening never to complete them. For such a person a patron might do much. Mrs.

[1] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 62.

[2] See '*Advice to the Herald.*'

Montagu at once expressed herself to Dr. Gregory (a common friend resident in Aberdeen) as highly pleased with Beattie's poetry. But it was not until she saw the first canto of the *Minstrel*, early in 1771, that her judgment was fully convinced. She now set to work with as much industry as charity to advance her chosen poet in the world of letters. She sent a copy of the new poem to Lord Chatham,[1] recommended it to the attention of Percy (the inspiration of whose essay on the minstrels had been acknowledged by Beattie in his preface), and encouraged her *protégé* by quoting to him the praises of Lord Lyttelton. She offered suggestions respecting the advertisement of the poem, and wrote to a bookseller of her acquaintance that he must recommend the poem 'to all people of taste.' Such were the powers of the female patron in this new age.

Mrs. Montagu also interested herself in another work of Beattie's, a book now quite forgotten but then just entering upon a brilliant career of popularity. This was no other than an *Essay on Truth*, which had been published in 1770, and had almost immediately passed into a second edition. Mrs. Montagu very flatteringly describes the vain efforts of the English public to come at this volume. She has herself recommended it 'to many of our Bishops and others; but all have complained this whole winter that the booksellers deny having either the first or second edition. I dare say many hundreds would have been sold if people could

[1] Forbes's *Life of Beattie* 1. 195; letter to Gregory, 13 March 1771.

have got them.'[1] It is quite obvious that the academic young poet needs the practical assistance of the bluestocking, friend of 'Bishops and others.' He therefore came up to London in the autumn of this year, and then first made the acquaintance of the woman whom he ever after gratefully acknowledged as his patron. And thus the Defender of Truth and the Defender of Shakespeare met together — to their mutual advantage. Mrs. Montagu's mind was already teeming with projects for the advancement of her favourite. In the spring of the next year, upon hearing that Adam Ferguson of Edinburgh University was to go abroad, she conceived the plan of having Beattie transferred to his chair, and succeeded in interesting the Archbishop of York in the matter, only to learn that the professor had every intention of returning to his work after his temporary absence.[2] Nevertheless she was the means of introducing Beattie to the Archbishop and to his brother, Lord Kinnoul,[3] who became warm friends of the new poet. In the following year she instructed Beattie in the best means of bringing his case to the attention of the King,[4] assuring him that if the government did nothing for him, she would herself 'claim the honour of rendering his situation in life more comfortable.'[5] But the

[1] *Ib.*

[2] M. Forbes's *Beattie and his Friends*, p. 66.

[3] *Ib.* p. 68.

[4] Forbes's *Life of Beattie* 1. 255; May 1773.

[5] *Ib.* 1. 260. Extract from Beattie's Diary; 21 May 1773.

government did not disappoint her. Beattie was presented to the King at his levee, received the incense of his praise, and, later, a pension of two hundred pounds, and a degree of Doctor of Laws from Oxford. Mrs. Montagu shared in the general praise. 'Do you not honour Mrs. Montagu,' wrote Hester Chapone to Mrs. Delany, 'for the pains she has taken to introduce this *excellent champion of Christianity* into the notice of the great world and to obtain for him some other regard than that of barren fame?' [1]

Her efforts on his behalf had but begun. Abandoning a plan that he should enter the Church of England — partly no doubt because of Beattie's own lukewarmness — she thinks he may perhaps do more service to religion as a layman than as a priest,[2] and she now urges the publication, by subscription, of a quarto volume of *Essays*. In this way, she thought, eight hundred or a thousand pounds might be gained.[3] Patron and *protégé* together drew up a form of 'subscription-paper,' and, since Beattie shrank from any advertisement in newspapers, Mrs. Montagu agreed, with the assistance of a few friends, to circulate the document herself.[4] She did her work well. In the list of subscribers to the book[5] she contrived to include not only every prominent bluestocking, but

[1] *Correspondence of Mrs. Delany* 4. 516; 13 June 1773.

[2] M. Forbes, *op. cit.* 78. In this matter Johnson's view happened to coincide with hers (*ib.* p. 90).

[3] *Ib.* p. 75. [4] *Ib.* pp. 95–6.

[5] *Essays*, Edinburgh 1776.

Reynolds, Garrick, Johnson, a host of peers, her friends the Bishops, the two Archbishops, and the libraries of Oxford. She was the recognized sponsor of the volume, and when the publication of it was delayed, it was part of her office to circulate an explanatory card of Beattie's.[1] When it finally appeared she was delighted with it in its every aspect, but professed to find it rather insolent in a native of Aberdeen to outdo the English in style.[2]

Meanwhile the second canto of the *Minstrel* had been sent to her for criticism, and was, if we are to believe Beattie, published at her request.[3] Four years later a volume of select poems was submitted to her with the request that she suppress those of which she did not approve; and when at last Beattie put forth the *Minstrel* in its final form, he requested permission to dedicate the first canto to her by putting her name into the last stanza in a space which had been left blank from the first:

> Here pause, my gothic lyre, a little while,
> The leisure hour is all that thou canst claim.
> But on this verse if Montagu should smile,
> New strains ere long shall animate thy frame.
> And her applause to me is more than fame;

[1] M. Forbes, p. 120.

[2] Beattie, always nervous about his Scotticisms, was flutteringly pleased, and some time later repaid her with this astounding piece of flattery: 'My models of English are Addison and those who write like Addison, particularly yourself, Madam, and Lord Lyttelton. We may be allowed to imitate what we cannot hope to equal.' Forbes's *Life* 2. 115; 30 January 1783.

[3] Forbes's *Life* 2. 132 and M. Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 110.

And still with truth accords her taste refined.
At lucre or renown let others aim,
I only wish to please the gentle mind
Whom Nature's charms inspire and love of human kind.

The sweetness of this languidly conventional note must have been somewhat spoiled for Mrs. Montagu by the fact that the lines were written before Beattie knew her, and were, if we may trust the poet's biographer, originally intended for another.[1] But there can be no doubt of Beattie's gratitude. He honoured his patroness by naming a son Montagu, and continued to visit her in London or in Sandelford and to submit his works to her for her approval,[2] that form of flattery which she coveted most of all. They honoured each other for many years with a reasonable regularity of correspondence which, however, does more credit to their earnestness than to their wit.

The relations of Beattie and Mrs. Montagu continued serene throughout their lives. Each was grateful to the other and never failed to make a public display of that gratitude. Mrs. Montagu bestowed her favours without offence, and Beattie received them without any pretence of hesitation. Each was happier for having known the other. And if the relation of

[1] Arbuthnot. Forbes's *Life* 1. 203 and *n.*

[2] He wrote that he had 'been making some progress in a little work of which you saw a sketch at Sandelford, and which you did me the honour to read and approve of. It was your approbation and that of the Bishop of Chester and Sir William Forbes that determined me to revise, correct, and enlarge it, with a view to publication.' Forbes 2. 164.

author and patron must needs exist, theirs is a specimen of what the relation may be at its best.

The relations of Robert Potter, the translator of Æschylus, with Mrs. Montagu are of the same general nature as those of Beattie. It was with trembling gratitude that he accepted and incredible flattery that he repaid the favours which the lady bestowed upon him. Her attention had, it would appear, been caught by the publication of the Greek tragedian in English, — the publication of translations being always a welcome event for bluestockings — and she at once suggested to the translator the propriety of adding explanatory notes. He adopted the suggestion, and, when publishing his Notes in the following year (1778), improved the opportunity to dedicate not only these but the original volume to his new-found patron. In a prefatory letter to her he outdid Beattie in the use of superlatives. The notes are written, he proclaims, only because Mrs. Montagu has asked for them, and with him a hint from that lady is a command; though he is incapable of understanding why so accomplished a person should ask for notes, since she needs them 'as little as any person alive.' The approbation of Mrs. Montagu, he concludes, is 'the highest honour any writer can receive.'

Loyalty was one of Mrs. Montagu's qualities. None of her *protégés* ever had occasion to complain that she lost interest or declined support. Her career as a

patron of the arts is sullied by no quarrels; she was the subject of no anonymous libels from the offended recipients of her charity. She continued her favours to Potter, urging him to proceed with his translation of Euripides,[1] and appearing prominently among the subscribers to that volume. She received him at her assemblies, and, according to a somewhat doubtful anecdote, presented him to Dr. Johnson.[2] Johnson, who considered Potter's work 'verbiage' (doubtless because it was in blank verse), snubbed the scholar and mumbled to the bluestocking, 'Well, well!' and 'Well, Madam, and what then?'

This ungracious reception may have helped Mrs. Montagu in inciting Potter to attack Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, some years later; but, according to Walpole, the chief aim was 'to revenge the attack on Lord Lyttelton.' There is, I believe, no existing evidence for this gossip, apart from the pamphlet itself; but there seems to be no good reason for rejecting it. In this paper, which, it must be said, is a sufficiently dignified and worthy pamphlet as pamphlets go, Potter quotes Mrs. Montagu's *Essay on Shakspeare* by way of demolishing Johnson's criticism of *The Bard*, and the lady and Bishop Hurd are proclaimed 'the two best Critics of this or any other age.'[3] Of this piece of nonsense Walpole has written the last word:

[1] See Forbes's *Beattie* 2. 41.

[2] *Literary Anecdotes of E. H. Barker*, London 1852.

[3] *Inquiry into some Passages in Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Poets, particularly his Observations on Lyric Poetry and the Odes of Gray.* London 1783.

Were I Johnson, I had rather be criticized than flattered so fulsomely. There is nothing more foolish than the hyperboles of contemporaries on one another, who, like the nominal Dukes of Aquitaine and Normandy at a coronation, have place given to them above all peers, and the next day shrink to simple knights.[1]

It is a pity that Potter could not have known that the utility of his translations, which have been reprinted again and again, would outlive the fame of his patron.

A classicist of much more importance than Potter did not disdain to court Mrs. Montagu. It was in June 1788, that William Cowper published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* his pleasant verses *On Mrs. Montagu's Feather Hangings*. He had himself not seen the room, but knew it from the descriptions of his cousin, Lady Hesketh, who was an aspirant to Mrs. Montagu's 'academy.'[2] The poet's purpose in the presentation of this poetical tribute seems to have been missed by his editors; but it is clear that he was yielding to the pressure of Lady Hesketh and attempting to bring himself and his forthcoming translation of Homer to the attention of the bluestocking. The first move was a failure. Mrs. Montagu, it would seem, took no notice of the lines in the magazine, though they were set forth as 'by the author of *The Task*,' already a poem of national fame. In August, Cowper writes to Lady Hesketh:

[1] *Letters* 13. 5.

[2] Cowper's *Letters*, edited by Thomas Wright, 3. 267.

To me, my dear, it seemeth that we shall never by any management make a deep impression on Mrs. Montagu. Persons who have been so long accustomed to praise become proof against it.[1]

It was necessary to adopt a new plan. Two years later Lady Hesketh decided to approach Mrs. Montagu herself, and requested Cowper to permit her to show a portion of the manuscript to that lady. The poet, who had long since admired the *Essay on Shakspeare* and who had acquired the most exaggerated notions of the lady's learning,[2] chose the first two books of the *Iliad* to present as a sample intending to 'carry her by a *coup de main*,' and employing 'Achilles, Agamemnon, and the two armies of Greece and Troy,' in his charge upon the bluestocking. To these the sixteenth book of the *Odyssey* was added by Lady Hesketh. 'It was very kind in thee,' he writes,[3] 'to sacrifice to this Minerva on my account.' But Minerva, who was now seventy, was probably glad to escape from the affair with a concealment of her ignorance of Homer. She wrote an enthusiastic, and, be it added, modest letter to Lady Hesketh about the new translation, and put

[1] Cowper's *Letters*, edited by Thomas Wright, 3. 306; 21 August 1788; cf. 3. 266; 267; 277.

[2] In March he wrote to Mrs. Throckmorton, 'The two first books of my *Iliad* have been submitted to the inspection and scrutiny of a great critic of your sex, at the instance of my cousin, as you may suppose. The lady is mistress of more tongues than a few (it is to be hoped she is single) and particularly she is mistress of the Greek.' *Letters* 3. 444; 21 March 1790. The book was published in July 1791.

[3] *Letters* 3. 439; 8 March 1790.

Mrs. Montagu

Johnson

JOHNSON POINTING OUT MRS. MONTAGU AS A PATRON OF THE ARTS

Reproduced from Barry's fresco in the Royal Society of Arts, by kind permission of the Society

her name on the subscribers' list. Cowper read the letter and expressed his pride in what was said; and there the matter ended.

The precise nature and extent of the assistance which Mrs. Montagu rendered to James Barry, the painter, it is now impossible to determine. Certain it is that she consented to be painted by him (in hideous profile) for that hodge-podge of fresco with which Barry covered the walls of the Royal Society of Arts. She is there depicted in her capacity as a patron of the arts.[1]

'Towards the centre of the picture,' writes Barry, 'is seen that distinguished example of female excellence, Mrs. Montagu, who long honoured the Society with her name and subscription. . . . Mrs. Montagu appears here recommending the ingenuity and industry of a young female whose work she is producing. . . . Between these ladies [the Duchesses of Devonshire and Portland] the late Dr. Samuel Johnson seems pointing out this example of Mrs. Montagu to their Graces' attention and imitation.'[2]

The juxtaposition of Johnson and Mrs. Montagu, the Great Dictator and the female Mæcenas, must have caused inextinguishable mirth among the spectators who knew of their great quarrel. Mrs. Montagu's resentment at Johnson's treatment of Lyttelton in the *Lives of the Poets* has been much discussed; but the story must be repeated once more for the sake of the

[1] See the accompanying illustration.

[2] Barry's *Series of Engravings in the . . . Society of Arts*, London 1808.

light which it throws upon Mrs. Montagu's ambitions to control the destinies of literature.

Mrs. Montagu and Lord Lyttelton had been close friends for many years preceding the death of the latter. They had laboured together on the *Dialogues of the Dead* (to the scandal, Walpole delighted to relate, of the lady's postilion [1]); and thus Mrs. Montagu's literary fame was, in a way, bound up with the peer's. When, eight years after the death of Lyttelton, Johnson's account of him appeared, it was found to contain remarks which did not please the friends of the late nobleman. Far from being satisfied that he should have been deemed worthy of inclusion even in so inclusive a list as Johnson's, they decided to take offence because a certain amount of blame was mingled with a certain amount of praise. Johnson had, for example, criticised 'poor Lyttelton' for thanking the Critical Reviewers for their commendatory notice of the *Dialogues of the Dead;* he spoke of Lyttelton's poems as having 'nothing to be despised and little to be admired,' and of his songs, in particular, as 'sometimes spritely and sometimes insipid.' Here surely is as much praise as posterity would care to give to Lyttelton; but it was not sufficient for the women who owed some part of their reputation to the fact that they had been intimate with a peer. According to Walpole, it was Mrs. Vesey who began the attack, but it was certainly Mrs. Montagu who conducted the campaign.

[1] Walpole's *Letters* 4. 319; 8 November 1759.

The reader of Fanny Burney's *Diary* is familiar with the details of this feud; the reader of Walpole will find four references to it in the letters written at the opening of 1781.

'She told me,' writes the latter, 'as a mark of her high displeasure, that she would never ask him to dinner again. I took her side, and fomented the quarrel, and wished I could have made Dagon and Ashtaroth scold in Coptic.' [1]

Nothing came of this literary feud save a scene at Streatham between Johnson and Pepys which frightened Fanny Burney, and Potter's attack on the *Lives* which has been mentioned already; and Mr. Dobson remarks that modern readers 'will perhaps wonder what the dispute was about.' [2] But it is significant as showing the influence which Mrs. Montagu thought she exerted in the world of letters, and the means which she adopted to make her influence felt.

Johnson's behaviour during this quarrel must, I think, have been due to something other than wounded vanity. It was, I am convinced, due to this very patronage of literature which the bluestockings, with Mrs. Montagu at their head, were attempting to set up. There can be no more annoying spectacle than that of a person to whom wealth and social talents have given a certain minor position in the literary world, and who, mistaking gifts for genius, attempts to exalt

[1] *Ib.* 11. 410; 8 March 1781.

[2] In his edition of the *Diary of Madame D'Arblay.*

that position to one of authority. This is what Mrs. Montagu was trying to do. She had, without a shadow of doubt, achieved a certain influence. She had bestowed pensions and gifts upon deserving authors and scholars. She had placed her name on a hundred subscription lists. She had contributed to the success of Hannah More's tragedy, *Percy*, by appearing, more than once, in a box at the theatre where it was being performed. Elizabeth Carter and Hester Chapone (who dedicated her *Letters* to Mrs. Montagu) were examples of the worthy writer whom she assisted in one way or another by her unostentatious charity. Laurence Sterne was content, as early as 1761, to make her a sort of literary executor,[1] 'not because she is our cousin — but because I am sure she has a good heart.' But when, through the influence of flattery, she mistook her kind heart and her pleasant interest in literature for the critical authority of a scholar and arbiter, an authority which can belong to but one or two in any age, she brought down upon herself, not unnaturally, the wrath of Johnson and the scorn of Walpole. By November 1776, she had reached the point where she could write thus to Garrick:

'I must say I felt for Shakspeare the anxiety one does for a dead friend, who can no longer speak for himself.' [2]

[1] See Melville's *Life of Sterne* 1. 289 ff. and Climenson's *Letters of Mrs. Montagu* 2. 270 ff.

[2] *Correspondence of David Garrick* 2. 189; 3 November 1776.

In 1778 she could seriously offer Fanny Burney, already renowned as the author of *Evelina*, the gift of her 'influence,' adding, 'We shall all be glad to assist in spreading the fame of Miss Burney.' [1]

She had the desire to direct and to manage which is characteristic of the experienced woman of fashion, who knows the value of her personal charm, rather than of the true literary critic, who is usually a person too wise to attempt to direct the stream of literature. But Mrs. Montagu was not content to let that stream flow as it would. She must bring comedies to the attention of Garrick [2] and suggest subjects to Hannah More [3] and Mrs. Carter; [4] she must guide Potter and encourage Beattie. In the pride of her power she even attempted the delicate task of influencing the elections to the Literary Club; and it would appear that, escaping the detection of Johnson, she succeeded in her aim, for her candidate, who was no other than Mr. Vesey, was chosen. But when she aspired to reverse the estimate of the greatest living critic and substitute the indulgent opinion of a personal friend, it is not surprising that Johnson should somewhat sharply have reminded her and her coterie of what their opinion was really worth. Few to-day will be found to regret that the lady's view did not prevail.

[1] *Diary* 1. 126.
[2] *Correspondence of David Garrick* 1. 388 ff.
[3] *A Later Pepys* 2. 283.
[4] *Posthumous Works of Mrs. Chapone* 1. 151.

At one point Mrs. Montagu's relations with her *protégés* come dangerously near to farce comedy. Like all the bluestockings, she was one of the believers in the genius of Ann Yearsley, the poetical milk-woman of Bristol, who was regarded for a time as a female Chatterton. It was part of the work of bluestockings to discover genius. They had discovered Hannah More; they had discovered Beattie and Mrs. Chapone; if they had not discovered Fanny Burney they had at least ferreted her out of the obscurity in which she wished to remain. But none of their literary finds seemed to them so bright with promise as the marvellous woman who sold milk from door to door in the unpoetical town of Bristol. It was Miss More who found her, and who, with Mrs. Montagu, advertised her with an ardour which does more credit to the quickness of their sympathies than to the quickness of their wits.

In 1783 Miss More discovered that Ann Yearsley, the milk-woman who called daily at her house in Bristol for kitchen-refuse with which to feed her pig, was accustomed to employ her leisure moments in the composition of verses. She at once took the woman in charge, taught her spelling, and the simplest rules of rhetoric, and after a lapse of some months felt that her pupil had made such progress that she might safely submit her verses to bluestocking judgment. The enthusiasm with which Mrs. Montagu and her friends received them is significant at once of their eagerness to assist the development of poetry and of their unfitness

for the task. Mrs. Montagu had not believed in Woodhouse, the poetical shoemaker, but a female Chatterton had more appeal. She wrote to Miss More,

'Let me come to the wondrous story of the milk-woman. Indeed she is one of the nature's miracles. What force of imagination! what harmony of numbers! In Pagan times one could have supposed Apollo had fallen in love with her rosy cheek, snatched her to the top of Mt. Parnassus, given her a glass of his best helicon, and ordered the nine muses to attend her call.'

This hypothesis being unsuitable to a Christian age, Mrs. Montagu suggests that the Scriptures, the Psalms, and the Book of Job in particular, may have taught the artless numbers to flow; whereupon she herself indulges in a flight:

Avaunt! grammarians; stand away! logicians; far, far away all heathen ethics and mythology, geometry and algebra, and make room for the Bible and Milton when a poet is to be made. The proud philosopher ends far short of what has been revealed to the simple in our religion. Wonder not, therefore, if our humble dame rises above Pindar or steps beyond Æschylus.[1]

Mrs. Montagu joyfully promises her support.

The rest of the blues were hardly less enthusiastic. Old Mrs. Delany circulated the milk-woman's 'proposals' to print;[2] Mrs. Boscawen sent in a 'handsome list of subscribers'; the Duchess of Beaufort requested a visit from Mrs. Yearsley; the Duchess of Portland

[1] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 363; 1784.

[2] *Correspondence of Mrs. Delany* 6. 209; 22 January 1784.

sent a twenty-pound bank-note. Walpole gave her money and the works of Hannah More.[1] The Duchess of Devonshire presented her with an edition of the English poets. All social London and half of literary London put its name on the list of subscribers. When, in 1785, the volume appeared, it was prefaced by a letter from Hannah More to Mrs. Montagu, telling Mrs. Yearsley's story, and recommending her to the good attentions of Mrs. Montagu, whose delight 'in protecting real genius' is well known. Mrs. Montagu's name was, indeed, writ large in the volume. In the address, *To Stella* (Stella being the milk-woman's name for Hannah More), Mrs. Montagu is referred to as

> That bright fair who decks a Shakespeare's urn
> With deathless glories.

Similar adulation is diffused through some seventy lines of a blank verse poem, *On Mrs. Montagu.* A passage from this will serve as well as anything to illustrate 'Lactilla's' powers:

> Lo! where she, mounting, spurns the stedfast earth,
> And, sailing on the cloud of science, bears
> The banner of Perfection. —
> Ask Gallia's mimic sons how strong her powers,
> Whom, flush'd with plunder from her Shakespeare's page,
> She swift detects amid their dark retreats;
> (Horrid as Cacus in their thievish dens)
> Regains the trophies, bears in triumph back
> The pilfer'd glories to a wond'ring world.
> So Stella boasts, from her the tale I learned;
> With pride she told it, I with rapture heard.

[1] *Letters* 13. 214; 13 November 1784.

Mrs. Yearsley was not loath to address the great in verse. Mr. Raikes of Manchester, the founder of Sunday Schools, the Duchess of Portland, and the Author of *The Castle of Otranto* (genially referred to as 'the Honourable H—e W—e') were all commemorated. Their influential patronage and sad Lactilla's melancholy tale made the volume immediately successful, and it passed into a fourth edition in 1786.

Lactilla might, however, have been happier had she been less successful. There had come to her, after the publication of her book, the not inconsiderable sum of three hundred and fifty pounds, which Hannah More held in trust for her. One is not surprised to learn that Miss More was cautious in paying out this money to Mrs. Yearsley, nor that this caution impressed the owner of the money as mere niggardliness. A sharp quarrel ensued which was fully set forth by both women, by Hannah More in her letters to Mrs. Montagu and by the poetess in the preface to her next volume of verses. It cost the poor milk-woman all her fine friends and the fine reputation which they had blown up for her. She sank gradually from view, and when she died, in 1806, was probably as obscure as when she was 'discovered' some twenty years before. Had she been of a philosophical temperament, she might perhaps have extracted some comfort from the cynical reflection that her fall had been well nigh as humiliating to her discoverers and patrons as to herself. Walpole continued for months to chuckle over the col-

lapse of her reputation, asserting that, if wise, she would now put gin in her milk and kill herself by way of attaining to an immortality like Chatterton's;[1] but the bluestockings were glad to forget the poor creature and the mischief they had done her, and the pathos of her latter state moved them only to passionate descriptions of her ingratitude.

[1] *Letters* 13. 432; 22 December 1786.

CHAPTER XI

Results

The London salon did not pass away without leaving behind it serious criticisms by serious people who knew it well. Thus Wraxall, writing of Mrs. Montagu's later assemblies, asserts that the charm departed with the death of Johnson, 'who formed the nucleus round which all the subordinate members revolved.' [1] Miss More, in reference to the same subject, says: 'The old little parties are not to be had in the usual style of comfort. Everything is great and vast and late and magnificent and dull.' [2] At a period much earlier than this, Gibbon made an interesting comparison between French and English society which is worthy of consideration in any attempt to judge the London salon. Writing at Paris, in May 1763, he says: 'Là [*i.e.* in London] on croit vous faire plaisir en vous recevant. Ici on croit s'en faire à soi-même'; [3] and elsewhere, 'In two months I am acquainted with more (and more agreable) people, than I knew in London in two years. Indeed the way of life is quite different.

[1] Wraxall's *Historical Memoirs* 1. 115.

[2] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 2. 225; April 1790.

[3] Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works* 1. 163; journal for May 1763.

Much less play, more conversation, and instead of our immense routs, agreable societies where you know and are known by almost every body you meet.' [1]

There may perhaps be something worth considering in the suggestion that the Gallic temperament lends itself more readily than the Saxon to the life and atmosphere of salons. I have already pointed out that one characteristic of that life, by which, indeed, its vitality is to be tested, is the peculiar nature of the friendships between the hostess and her author-guest. In London such relations are found, but they seem tame, cool, and unequal. Passion is unknown in them. It is inevitable that the salon, if not the literature that springs from it, should suffer from this lack; and this contention cannot be dismissed by insisting that authors are better off without such questionable friendships. For better or for worse, these made for the production of literature, and one cannot think of the great Parisian salons as existing without them.

But we must go farther. The great English authors in general not only declined to form such intimate associations in the salons, but looked on literary assemblies with something approaching contempt, if indeed they paid any attention whatever to them. The attitude of Johnson is hardly to be thought of as an exception to this statement. After his death he was loudly claimed as a member of the innermost bluestocking circle, and he was so considered by more

[1] *Private Letters of Gibbon* 1. 31; 25 March 1763.

than one contemporary. Miss More, for example, in her *Bas Bleu* described Johnson as generally participating in the assemblies of the bluestockings. This assertion might be quite misleading, if we did not have Boswell's *Life* to correct the impression. The amount of time which Johnson spent in such assemblies is almost negligible. One smiles to think what a tornado would have burst from him, had it been hinted to him that his literary activity was in any way vitalized by women. The attitude of other authors is even clearer. Burke was admittedly a renegade from the salons.[1] Goldsmith does not appear to have had dignity or authority enough to interest the bluestockings very much. Sheridan, who might easily have shone in salons, was pre-occupied with dramatic and political affairs. Sterne, Walpole, and Gibbon knew the Parisian salon too well to have any illusions about its London offspring. Approaching the matter from the other side, it must be obvious that the salon could not win great distinction from those persons who were content to accept its favours and submit to its influence. Beattie and Hannah More, the translator of Epictetus and the translator of Sophocles, and even the author of the excellent *Cecilia* — these were but feeble luminaries for an institution, which, if it is to win recognition at all, must shine with a splendour that is piercing.

[1] See above, p. 123. As early as 1769, Mrs. Carter had long regretted that he had left 'the tranquil pleasures of select society for the turbulent schemes of ambition.' *Letters to Mrs. Montagu* 2. 23.

Even when all this has been taken into account, the real question is still to ask. Why did not English authors more generally seek the inspiration and assistance of this institution? The salon was not without a certain power: it was generous; it had influence with publishers and with booksellers; it could bring authors into pleasant and profitable contact with one another. But despite all this, the bluestockings never became, like their French models, true disseminators of ideas; they were never the devotees of new and daring philosophies and of radical transitions. They were always on the side of law and order, and of a conservative tradition. They stood for the classicism of English literature. Now no temper could have been more unfortunate than this at the moment when the bluestockings sought to exert their influence. The things which they represented were already passing away, and with the things that were coming to birth they felt no profound sympathy. They did, it is true, show a certain interest in romanticism, and Mrs. Vesey scandalized her sisters by getting interested in agnosticism; but the true significance of these things they never guessed. None of them glimpsed that dawn in which to be alive was bliss. They were apart from the whole current of European literature. At the moment when poets were hearkening to the voices of new gods, the bluestockings were prolonging faint echoes of conservatism; at the moment when poetry was deserting the metropolis and schools of literature

were shattering into individualism, they cast their influence on the side of a yet closer centralization. English literature was about to find its true exponents in two men who were about as far removed from the influence of salons as can well be imagined, the shy recluse of Olney, and the passionate poet of the Lowlands.

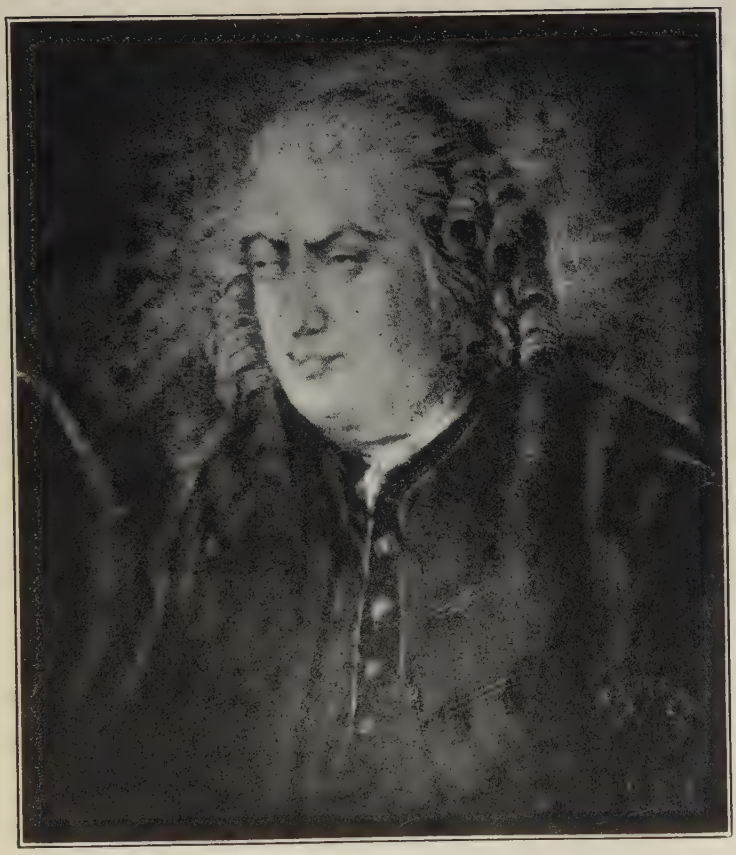
Thus the salon, judged by classical models, must be said to have failed. It was born out of its due time. Had the position of woman in the English literary world permitted it to flower fifty years earlier, there might have been a different story to tell. As it is, we must be content to study it as an interesting attempt to domesticate a foreign institution and as a revelation of certain significant features in English literary life. Conceived in its strictest sense, it is difficult to claim for the salon more than this.

But there is a freer sense in which the whole movement may be conceived. We may turn our eyes from the bluestockings and their somewhat tiresome assemblies to consider the broader manifestations of the social instinct. The age which we are studying is unique in English literature as having struck out or brought to perfection types of literature which exist solely to record and celebrate the social life. That body of work is perhaps its most significant, and certainly its most characteristic, contribution to English literature. It is no idle speculation that sees in it the working of the same spirit which tried to express itself in the salon.

Full expression was reserved for this spirit in simpler forms of social life, and out of these rose a body of literature worthy to represent it. To this truer manifestation of the social spirit in letters we now address our attention.

PART III

THE SOCIAL SPIRIT IN ENGLISH LETTERS



SAMUEL JOHNSON

From a photograph, preserved in the British Museum, of an undescribed painting, formerly attributed to Gainsborough

CHAPTER XII

Johnson and the Art of Conversation

Chapters like this usually begin with a lament. The age of conversation, it is proper to begin, is gone, gone with the harpsichord and the minuet and the long, leisurely evenings when the bluestockings discussed literature and the theory of equality. The rush of modern life, one continues, has killed conversation, even as the penny post has killed the art of letter-writing. In all this there is much false sentiment and false implication. It is foolish to assume the existence of a time when talk was universally clever and wise. There were dullards even in 1780. Cards and dancing, then as now, were sought as a relief from thinking, and serious talkers were not seldom voted a nuisance. No doubt they often were. The bluestockings, as we have seen, sometimes bored even themselves. The reputation of the age for conversation depended upon a few.

It is difficult to recover a sufficient body of this conversation upon which to base an opinion. It is a much easier thing to read about then to get at. Plenty of essays on conversation have been preserved — no manual for young ladies was without one — but the talk itself is not so easy to find. We have Chester-

field's advice to his son on how to shine in conversation, but the record of Chesterfield's own discourse is little better than a collection of puns and bits of repartee, mere flotsam and jetsam. Cowper wrote a long and rather dreary poem on colloquial happiness, but where is Cowper's conversation? Fielding, too, wrote an essay on the subject, but it is a rather priggish affair (for Fielding), and the perusal of it only fills us with regret that we must take this poor substitute for the brilliant chatter that went on about the punch-bowl. The scraps of talk casually embedded in works on other subjects, the anecdotes, jests, and *bons mots* have lost with time much of their flavour and significance, and give us no adequate notion of the distinctive opinions held by their authors, no grounds for large general conclusions about them, and no conception of the general strain of their talk. There is no steady light from these flashes of eloquence and wit. At most they make us regret what we have lost. Thus there is every reason to suppose that the conversation of Richard Brinsley Sheridan was a model of brilliance; but the collection of his sayings recorded by Moore is quite lacking in the grace of reality. These good things are without a foil; they need arrangement; they are mere ornaments adorning nothing, a little heap of unset gems.

To all this there is but one exception, the grand exception of Boswell's record of Johnson. Perhaps the chief distinction of that record is that it gives us not

only the high lights in the conversation, not only its exciting moments, but its very *longueurs* (as Horace Walpole objected), its ineptitude, its occasional inconclusiveness. There is, therefore, something by which the wit of it all is set off. It has the ring of vitality. It is to the everlasting credit of Boswell that he let us see the worst of Johnson's talk, that, in the words of Hannah More, he 'mitigated none of his asperities,' but gave us the heaviness as well as the wit and the rudeness as well as the depth. We hear the voice of Johnson, not a mere quotation of his words.

But in spite of the obvious faults of Johnson's talk, it is difficult to speak of it without a continuous and perhaps offensive use of superlatives. Age could not wither Johnson. Instead of impairing his memory, time enriched it. The pomposity of his written work never impedes his quickness of wit in conversation. He was, to be sure, fond of parading that pomposity of style for the amazement and amusement of his hearers, and it is scarcely true to say that he used one style in writing and another in talking. It would be nearer the truth to say that, as he grew older, he tended to introduce more of the ease of his talk into his written work. Sentence after sentence from the *Lives of the Poets* might be cited to show the almost colloquial ease of his later manner, and significant parallels might be drawn. Yet it is certain that conversation gave more scope to that aptness of homely illustration which was his most entertaining gift. Posterity is right in

preferring Johnson's conversation to his writings, for while it lacks nothing in the stream of thought and finish of style that distinguish his writings, it is distinctly superior in mother wit.

In the heat of conversation Johnson had a stimulus which he never felt in writing, the joy of personal contention. He admittedly regarded conversation as a contest, and was frankly contemptuous of the type of man who, like Addison or Goldsmith, was always at his best when he was arguing alone. Of two men talking, Johnson asserted, one must always rise superior to the other. For himself he had too much pride to be contentedly submerged by the conversation of others. Rather than be worsted, he would strike below the belt, or, in the words of Boswell, 'toss and gore several persons.' He had a rough and ready way of escaping from difficulties. When Mrs. Frances Brooke requested him to look over her new tragedy, complaining that she herself had no time to revise it, since she had 'so many irons in the fire,' the sage replied, 'Why, then, Madam, the best thing I can advise you to do is to put your tragedy along with your irons.' 'If your company does not drive a man out of his house, nothing will,' he said to Boswell because the Scotsman had ventured to defend the Americans. When he got the floor — and by the use of such methods he got it very often — he was not inclined to abandon it, and the conversation became a monologue. Goldsmith, who so often had the right in dispute and was, indeed,

one of the wittiest opponents Johnson ever had, complained that he was 'for making a monarchy of what should be a republic.' Even Boswell admitted that in Johnson's company men did not so much interchange conversation as listen to what was said. But, whatever lofty notions of conversation we may cherish, it may be questioned whether it can ever be a republic. If the flow of talk is to get anywhere, if it is to reach a conclusion, it must be confined within a rather narrow channel or it is certain to dissipate itself. Johnson hated spattering talk. He censured Goldsmith because he was always 'coming on without knowing how he was to get off,' and asserted that he could not talk well because he had made up his mind about nothing. 'Goldsmith,' said he, 'had no settled notions upon any subject; so he talked always at random.' It was not so with Johnson. He saw his conclusions and drove straight towards them, scattering his opponents or knocking them on the head if they impeded him.

But it would be a mistake to infer that Johnson was a sort of conversational head-hunter, or the ourang-outang of the drawing-room whom Macaulay depicts, alternately howling and growling and rending his associates in pieces before our eyes. If we have any respect for the consistent testimony of his contemporaries, we shall come to realize that he talked somewhat unwillingly. He had to be drawn out. 'He was like the ghosts,' said Tyers. Nothing annoyed him more than to be shown off. At the famous Wilkes dinner, to

which he had been taken simply that he might contend with a worthy opponent, he was so angry when he realized what had happened that he took up a book, 'sat down upon a widow seat and read, or at least kept his eye upon it intently for some time,' exactly as upon the very different occasion of his first meeting with Fanny Burney.

Because of this lack of pliability in Johnson, Boswell deserves far more credit than he has ever received for his success in making him talk. Boswell, though not a profound thinker, was of a mind curious and alert. He is entirely misjudged by those readers — if, indeed, they are ever readers — who join Macaulay in thinking him a fool. Boswell said foolish things, to be sure, and asked the foolishest questions, as what proportion of their wages housemaids might properly spend on their attire, how hogs were slaughtered in the Tahiti Islands, and what Dr. Johnson would do if he were shut up in a tower alone with a new-born baby; but under the silliest of them there is always a keen experimentalist, an amused observer tickling a giant with a straw. Boswell introduced a valuable amount of friction into Johnson's life, arranged that he should meet men whose views were wholly opposed to his own, carried him off to dine with Whigs, got him to call on Lord Monboddo (who held the most offensive opinions about primitive man), introduced him to General Paoli, and to Beattie and Sir Adam Fergusson (of the infamous race of Scots), and dragged him across all Scotland to Mull and Icom-

kill. No one else so mastered the art of managing Johnson as this same wily Scot. Mrs. Thrale could not do it. Neither Goldsmith nor Dr. Taylor could do it. Topham Beauclerk might perhaps have done it, had he thought it worth while. Fanny Burney had the subtle combination of grace and ability which appealed to Johnson, but was lacking in force. When she attempted to show Johnson to her 'Daddy Crisp,' or to engage him in conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Greville, her failure was conspicuous. The great man's placid self-absorption gave a deeper offence than any tirade could have done.

Johnson had at times so serene a manner that, in an affable moment, he declared to Boswell that 'that is the happiest conversation where there is no competition, no vanity, but a calm, quiet interchange of sentiments.' Such is the general strain of his conversation at Streatham, as recorded by Miss Burney.[1] Here we detect a playfulness, even a frivolity, of manner which is a pleasant contrast to the more professional tone with which Boswell has familiarized us. There is in it no hint of dress parade. It is a very human conversation, containing most of the faults that disgrace our own. Johnson gossips. He talks of the weather; he talks of his friends behind their back —

[1] Miss Burney was well aware of the difference here noted. In talking with Wyndham of Johnson's life at Streatham, she gave 'a little history of his way of life there, — his good humour, his sport, his kindness, his sociability, and all the many excellent qualities that, in the world at large, were by so many means obscured.' *Diary* 3. 477.

what true comrade ever failed to do that? — and will even indulge in a bit of scandal. He talks of Sheridan's marriage with the beautiful prima donna, Elizabeth Linley, and of Goldsmith's fracas with his Welsh publisher, Evans; and censures or defends Garrick or Foote as the mood impels. There are even moments when he emulates Goldsmith and makes himself a laughing-stock for the delectation of his friends.

'Our roasting,' he once remarked, when describing the state of his kitchen, 'is not magnificent, for we have no jack. . . . Small joints, I believe, they manage with a string, and larger are done at the tavern. I have some thoughts (with profound gravity) of buying a jack, because I think a jack is some credit to a house'

'Well,' remarked Mr. Thrale, 'but you'll have a spit, too?'

'No, sir, no; that would be superfluous; for we shall never use it; and if a jack is seen, a spit will be presumed!'

This feature of the Johnsonian manner, which might almost be compared with Goldsmith's fondness for the rôle of fool, has been generally overlooked. One may doubt whether even Boswell was more than dimly aware of it. Yet there can be little doubt that Johnson enjoyed assuming and playing a part. He was certainly not a bear, but he enjoyed playing the bear, and hugged his victims to death that the world might laugh. It was his peculiar misfortune to play the rôle too well, as it was Goldsmith's misfortune to play the fool too well. Again, Johnson was assuredly not at

heart a pompous man; yet he could in a moment assume pomposity and drop into the rôle of Gargantua. But he sometimes created such consternation in the part that the world did not dare to laugh. Thus, in the trite old illustration of his remark about Buckingham's *Rehearsal*, he revised the crisp sentence, 'It has not wit enough to keep it sweet,' into the crazy pomposity of, 'It has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction.' It is amazing that Macaulay and the world of readers after him could delude themselves into thinking that Johnson was seriously attempting to improve this sentence. It was, on the contrary, a pose worthy of Laurence Sterne. It was a favourite device of a true humourist putting forth a caricature of himself. Instances of it could be multiplied indefinitely. Remarking on the morality of the *Beggars' Opera*, for example, he said, 'It may have some influence for evil by making the character of a rogue familiar, and in some degree pleasing'; then with the familiar shift of style, 'There is in it such a *labefactation* of all principles as to be injurious to morality.' Gibbon and Cambridge, who were present, could regard this stylistic somersault as an attempt at critical dignity, and even Boswell felt that he must smother his mirth. Fanny Burney, had she been there, would, I imagine, have smiled confidently in Johnson's face, for she appreciated this aspect of his talk better than others. It is to her that we owe Johnson's delicious criticism of his pensioners, and, in particular of the mysterious

Miss Poll Carmichael: 'I could make nothing of her; she was wiggle-waggle, and I could never persuade her to be categorical.'

But however dull the eighteenth century may have been in apprehending this type of humour, it did full justice to the more serious side of Johnson's conversation. It was chiefly impressed, as every age must be, with the scope and versatility of the man's mind. It is of course the merest platitude to remark that Johnson's conversation is characterized by breadth of interest and accuracy of information; yet, like many platitudes, it is essential to an examination of the subject. It is most significant of the man and of the age in which he lived — so far removed from the narrowness of our own age of specialization — simply to turn the pages of Boswell's *Life* and note the number of topics upon which Johnson talked with that easy mastery which distinguishes the scholar and philosopher from the promiscuously well-informed man of the world. Take, for example, the topics touched upon in a dozen consecutive pages of the book, chosen at random; evidence for supernatural appearances, the Roman Church, the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England, the Royal Marriage Bill, the respect due to old families, the art of mimicry, the word *civilisation* ('shop' was evidently not an excluded topic), vitriol, the question, Was there one original language? the relation of Erse to Irish, the rights of schoolmasters, in the infliction of punishment, the Lord Chancellors, the Scotch accent,

the future state of the soul, prayers for the dead, the poet Gray, Akenside, Elwal the heretic, the question, Is marriage natural to man? (it seems that it is not), the philosophy of beauty, swearing, the philosophy of biography, the proper use of riches, the philosophy of philanthropy. Here surely is a sufficiently varied list. But no mere enumeration can give any notion of the novelty of Johnson's thinking. His remarks are no echo, no quotation. They are the natural up-welling of an original mind, showing us that Johnson was a philosopher; but they also reveal a fund of accurate detail and an ability to quote chapter and verse, showing us that Johnson was a scholar. These two offices may be quickly illustrated from the topics enumerated above. When Boswell introduced the subject of the future state of the soul, he made the highly conventional observation that 'one of the most pleasing thoughts is that we shall see our friends again.' Whereupon Johnson replied:

> Yes, Sir; but you must consider, that when we are become purely rational, many of our friendships will be cut off. Many friendships are formed by a community of sensual pleasures: all these will be cut off. We form many friendships with bad men, because they have agreeable qualities, and they can be useful to us; but, after death, they can no longer be of use to us. We form many friendships by mistake, imagining people to be different from what they really are. After death, we shall see every one in a true light. Then, Sir, they talk of our meeting our relations: but then all relationship is dissolved; and we shall have no

regard for one person more than another, but for their real value. However, we shall either have the satisfaction of meeting our friends, or be satisfied without meeting them.

There is Johnson the philosopher. Five minutes later, Boswell was saying, 'I have been told that in the Liturgy of the Episcopal Church of Scotland, there was a form of prayer for the dead,' to which Johnson replied, 'Sir, it is not in the liturgy which Laud framed for the Episcopal Church of Scotland; if there is a liturgy older than that, I should be glad to see it.' There is Johnson the scholar.

It would be rash to assert that Johnson was always on safe ground, and ludicrous to assert that he was always right. He enjoyed a random shot at the truth as well as any other man whose chief interest is in the vitality of his thinking rather than in the literalness of his conclusions; but it was a diversion which he seldom permitted to others, and a tendency in himself which was generally restrained by the specialists about him. Here we have a truly formative element in the social life of the time.

But no man of the eighteenth century could hold his hearers simply by the display of a wealth of information. Brilliancy of manner was as indispensable as breadth of mind. 'Weight without lustre is lead,' wrote Lord Chesterfield. No good talker was without a superficial attraction. Garrick was noted for the histrionic quality, Beauclerk for acidity, and Goldsmith for Irish

humour. Johnson's conversation, from the inner fire of it, was for ever sparkling into wit and epigram. Yet he never made the mistake of serving his friends with nothing but epigrams, which is very like serving one's guests with nothing but *hors d'œuvres*. Epigram stimulates the appetite, but does not satisfy it, and will not do for a steady diet. It is with Johnson, however, something more than a mannerism. It was the form that lent itself best to the expression of his critical faculty. An examination of Johnson's literary criticism will reveal the fact that his method is prevailingly sententious and summary. He was impatient of a long and slow development of thought, nor did he 'wind into' a subject, like Burke. In reading the *Lives of the Poets*, we do not feel that matters are gradually illuminated, but that they are revealed by sudden flashes. If his criticism offends, it is usually because it is a final pronouncement and is too summary to be adequate. When he attempts an orderly criticism of details, the method, though more elaborate, is usually less satisfying. He is at his best when he is most crisp and dogmatic: 'If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found?' 'Dryden is read with frequent astonishment, and Pope with perpetual delight.' 'His page,' he says of Addison, 'is always luminous, but never blazes in unexpected splendour.' The value of Johnson's criticism consists in such sentences as these, not in longer passages of sustained comment like the analysis of Gray's *Bard*.

Now whatever charm or power there is in such a method is found also in Johnson's conversation. There is the same pointed style, the same finality of tone, and often the same irritating quality: 'No man,' said he of Goldsmith, 'was more foolish when he had not a pen in his hand, or more wise when he had.' 'That man [Lyttelton] sat down to write a book to tell the world what the world had all his life been telling him.' 'All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience for it.' 'In republics there is not a respect for authority, but a fear of power.' Many profess to dislike such an epigrammatic style as this; but I incline to think that those who protest most loudly against such *dicta* are those who are least capable of thinking them out. At any rate, if they accomplished no more, such statements gave something to attack, and the desire to demolish is of the very soul of conversation.

Those who are offended by such a conversational method might attack it more effectively by pointing out that it was often employed to startle rather than to instruct. Johnson felt the normal human desire to shock people, and indulged to the full his transitory moods. 'Rousseau,' he would exclaim, 'is a very bad man. I should like to have him work in the plantations!' 'I am willing to love all mankind, *except an American*.' In a fit of petulance he even quoted with approval the ridiculous remark, 'For anything I can see, foreigners are fools.' There is no deliberation in such words; it is, in truth, hardly fair to quote them.

At any rate, they are entirely misleading when taken out of their setting; for it is the charm of conversation that it is not deliberate, and that a talker may dare to have a prejudice as well as an opinion. A good talker will 'paint a man highly' for the mere love of painting. Voltaire and all free talkers with him are guilty of the same excesses. Madame Necker tells us that in listening to Voltaire it was necessary to distinguish the statements that were truly characteristic of the man from those which were dictated by the passing mood and were no more than the *vérité du moment.* It is the peculiar office of conversation thus to give the whole man, with all his faults upon his head, all his lapses from sense and self-consciousness, all his irrationalities and inconsistencies: it is these things that show that he is human. It was Johnson himself who remarked that in conversation 'you never get a system.' Let us be grateful that it is so. A 'unified' person, a man whose mind is governed by a system, cannot converse; he can only lecture. His thoughts flow like a canal, not like a river. He is really the most limited of men, for he must live within his system as he lives within his income. It is the glory of Johnson's conversation that you cannot make a system out of it. For a system you must go to the *Rambler* or *The Vanity of Human Wishes.*

But this is not to say that Johnson had no conversational principles or that he uttered thoughts merely because they were novel. His 'stream of

mind' — to use one of his own phrases — was free, but it was not therefore without a very definite trend. Like a stream again, he drew constantly upon his sources, certain general conclusions about life, which really control his conversation. He himself declared that general principles were not to be had from a man's talk, but from books. Certainly this dictum does not apply to his own talk, for general principles are obvious enough in it. It is quite evident that we are listening to a man who has made up his mind about life and about what is worth while. If, unlike Goldsmith, he talked well in public, it was because, like Imlac, he had thought well in private. It is his constant custom to bring the casual topic immediately into the realm of general principles, and thus the talk about a particular subject becomes a philosophy of it. Boswell realized this, and introduced topic after topic in order to get it cleared up once for all. 'I *wished to have it settled*,' he says, 'whether duelling was contrary to the laws of Christianity.' He always felt that Johnson could have settled the whole matter of necessity and freewill, if only he had been willing to talk about it. Of a lady talking with Johnson of the resurrection body, he naïvely remarks, 'She seemed desirous of knowing more, but he left the question in obscurity.' Such is his confidence in his master's method.

It is always profitable to delve through Johnson's talk to the philosophy that underlies it; but not unfrequently he spares us the trouble by enunciating

the principle himself. Thus when the subject of gaming arose, he pronounced as follows:

> Sir, I do not call a gamester a dishonest man; but I call him an unsocial man, an unprofitable man. Gaming is a mode of transferring property without producing any intermediate good. Trade gives employment to numbers, and so produces intermediate good.

Whether this doctrine be economically sound I do not know; but it is plainly a *doctrine*. He delighted in such formulation of principles. Thus when Hume's statement that all who are happy are equally happy was quoted to him, he replied with a definition of happiness:

> Sir, that all who are happy are equally happy is not true. A peasant and a philosopher may be equally *satisfied*, but not equally *happy*. Happiness consists in a multiplicity of agreeable consciousness. A peasant has not capacity for having equal happiness with a philosopher.

In like manner, he deduced principles of æsthetics from a teacup, and demolished the theory of equality by inviting the footman to sit down and dine.

But Johnson's conversation is more than a *reductio ad principia*, as it is more than epigram and more than information. Philosophic in method, it was creative in effect. It fertilized other minds, and attained to new life long after it was uttered and forgotten. Johnson cannot be measured by one who reads only his writings, but he can be measured by one who reads only his conversation. Thus his work is linked with that of

men who have accomplished more by the spoken word than by the written thought, so that, on the one hand, it has its place in the history of table-talk, like that of Selden and Coleridge, and, on the other, typifies the relation of society and letters at its best. By the dynamic force of his conversation Johnson developed men, he woke in them powers of which they did not know themselves to be possessed, and raised them to higher levels of attainment than his own. Men listened to him with rage or with wonder, as the Hebrews to a prophet and the Romans to a Sibyl, and they scoffed or recorded according to their mood. Of much of this Johnson was, fortunately, unconscious. He regarded his books as his chief influence upon the world. 'Now, Sir,' said he, 'the good I can do by my conversation bears the same relation to the good I can do by my writings that the practice of a physician retired to a small country town, does to his practice in a great city.' But Boswell saw more clearly. 'To me,' he said, 'his conversation seemed more remarkable than even his writings.' When, in 1776, Boswell returned to Johnson's side, he felt at once the electric force. 'I felt myself elevated as if brought into another state of being,' he wrote; and said to Mrs. Thrale, 'I am quite restored by him, by transfusion of *mind*.' The cynical will of course dismiss this as a spasm of hero-worship; but it is more than that. No one will be inclined to accuse Edmund Burke of worshipping Johnson, yet he remarked: 'To the conversation of this truly great

man I am proud to acknowledge that I owe the best part of my education.' Orme the historian remarked that in conversation Johnson gave one either 'new thoughts or a new colouring.' Testimony of an even more striking character may be quoted from Reynolds. Speaking of his own *Discourses on Art*, Reynolds said:

> Whatever merit they have must be imputed, in a great measure, to the education which I may be said to have had under Dr. Johnson. I do not mean to say, though it would certainly be to the credit of these Discourses if I could say it with truth, that he contributed even a single sentiment to them: but he qualified my mind to think justly. . . . The observations which he made on poetry, on life, and on everything about us, I applied to our art.

Those who heard the conversation of Johnson may be said to have witnessed literature in the making. At any rate, Johnson's talk became literature by the simple fact of being recorded. It is the best example that can be given of the fusion of the literary life with the social, and brought to bear the same kind of influence which the salons were trying to exert. It was destined to give Johnson his distinctive place in the literature. It was regarded, and properly, by Boswell as constituting the peculiar value of his *Life of Johnson*, and as it was the chief inspiration, so it remains the chief attraction of that remarkable book.

CHAPTER XIII

Walpole and the Art of Familiar Correspondence

The golden age of English letter-writing arrived without a period of long and painful preparation. With the more rudimentary correspondence of the seventeenth century, the new art had but the slightest relations, appearing in full bloom almost as soon as it appeared at all. There was of course much in England to encourage it. It is significant, for example, that the era of letter-writing was coincident with the production of large numbers of novels in letter-form, which made the art the vehicle of a new realism, and thus helped to spread the popularity of both types at once. Again, the era was also that of the development of the salons and of the art of conversation, a coincidence which is duplicated in the literary history of France.[1] Letter-writing, considered as a familiar art — and we have no concern with its other aspects — is but written conversation, a sort of *tête-à-tête*, with the talking, for the moment, all one side. It is dominated by a smiling intimacy, and it is this note

[1] 'Cette littérature devait briller des le dix-septième siècle, puisque dès lors se forme et se propage en France l'esprit de société. . . . Avant cet âge, en France du moins, les salons n'existent pas.' P. de Julleville's *Histoire de la Littérature Française* 5. 600.

which one feels to be a new thing in the correspondence of the eighteenth century, a note which is heard but seldom in the letters of an earlier period. The models of the new style were, in fact, not English. When Chesterfield was choosing exemplars for his son, he took no account of English letter-writers; he cites Cicero and Cardinal d'Ossat as models for serious correspondence, and then adds: 'For gay and amusing letters, for *enjouement* and *badinage*, there are none that equal Comte Bussy's and Madame Sévigné's. They are so natural that they seem to be the extempore conversation of two people of wit rather than letters. I would advise you to let that book be one of your itinerant library.' [1] The regard for Madame de Sévigné was well-nigh universal. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who probably found her too womanly, is almost alone in her dislike. Thomas Gray has been said to imitate her.[2] Fanny Burney, who had read her from the days of her youth, considered her 'almost all that can be wished to form female perfection,' felt attached to her as though she were alive and in the same room, and longed to run into her arms.[3] Mrs. Boscawen created an almost national sensation by circulating a rumour of the discovery in France of five hundred new letters of Madame de Sévigné. All the blues were in a flutter over it. Mrs. Montagu wrote to Hannah More that

[1] *Letters*, ed. Bradshaw, 1. 55.
[2] *Memoirs of Sir James Mackintosh* 2. 172.
[3] *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* 2. 266.

the truth of the matter would be evident at once upon publication, since Madame de Sévigné's style was 'of all things the most inimitable.'[1] Miss More yielded to none in her admiration, and in one of her happiest phrases compares her to a 'master sketching for his own amusement.' But all this admiration is as nothing compared with the worship which Walpole gave the French writer. 'My dear Madame de Sévigné,' he calls her, 'that divine woman,' 'my saint,' and 'Notre Dame de Livry.' He collected relics of her with a fervour fairly religious, and enshrined them under her portrait. The cult became a jest among his friends. Madame du Deffand sent him a snuff-box, with the likeness of Madame de Sévigné painted upon it, and wrote a letter as from the lady herself to accompany the gift:

Des champs Elisées.

(Point de succession de tems; point de date.)

Je connois votre folle passion pour moi; votre enthousiasme pour mes lettres, votre vénération pour les lieux que j'ai habités: J'ai appris le culte que vous m'y avez rendu: j'en suis si pénétrée que j'ai sollicité et obtenu la permission de mes Souverains de vous venir trouver pour ne vous quitter jamais. J'abandonne sans regret ces lieux fortunés; je vous préfère à tous ses habitans: jouissez du plaisir de me voir; ne vous plaignez point que ce ne soit qu'en peinture; c'est la seule existence que puissent avoir les ombres. . . .[2]

When people bored Walpole with talk of Shakespeare and Swift, he would set his thoughts upon Madame

[1] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 2. 26; cf. Walpole's *Letters* 14. 65 *et passim.*

[2] *Letters* 7. 9–10.

de Sévigné [1] as a monk takes refuge in holy meditation. 'If she could have talked nonsense,' he cries, 'I should, like any other bigot, believe she was inspired.' [2]

Worshipping her thus, it is not surprising that he should have been, even in his own day, compared to her.[3] He affected to regard such praise as blasphemy; but, though he was in all probability secretly pleased, he was too great an artist in his own way not to realize that there was a difference between him and the goddess of his idolatry. It is typical of this difference that one thinks instinctively of Walpole as the 'prince of letter-writers' and of Madame de Sévigné as a friend. Walpole was too strongly individualist to be quite the 'perfect medium' that we find in the marquise. We are conscious of his cleverness, his prejudices, his distortions, his rank and snobbishness. We think of Walpole as often as we think of Walpole's news. His art is not, however, the less perfect, but only different in method. He does not, like Madame de Sévigné, simply transmit the light, but stains and fractures it so that it glows with a confusion of colours and flashing rays. Walpole could never have attained to the pearl-like perfection of Madame de Sévigné. If we must needs deal in parallels, we shall find a much closer one between Madame de Sévigné and William Cowper.

[1] *Ib.* 5. 87.

[2] *Ib.* 6. 356.

[3] Madame Necker asserted that he was 'as like Madame de Sévigné as two peas.' *Letters* 10. 80. Horace Mann had noticed the similarity many years before. *Ib.* 2. 410.

The recluse of Olney, like the Lady of Livry, had caught the secret of the unpremeditated art. Walpole — like the prince that he is — is almost never free from a sense of his rank.

I am tempted to say that this self-consciousness of Walpole is an art in itself. He enjoys displaying various sides of himself, plays with his prejudices, exaggerates all his enthusiasms and all his dislikes, affects to be old and look back over a vista of years, jests about his gout and the infallible bootikins, pretends to believe that the country is going to the dogs, and takes refuge at Strawberry Hill among his cats and his cameos. There are moments when he is as full of humours as Charles Lamb. Throughout three thousand letters his sprightliness, that subtle union of wit and grace, is hardly once at fault; everything seems to contribute to it. Does he cross the Channel in rough weather? He is drowned without being shipwrecked. He has a 'lap full of waves,' is 'washed from head to foot in the boat at ten o'clock at night,' and plunged into the sea up to his knees. '*Qu'avois-je à faire dans cette galère?* In truth, it is a little late to be seeking adventures.' [1] Condemned to a state of eternal emaciation, none shall outdo him in the description of his leanness: he is 'emaciated, wan, wrinkled,' a 'poor skeleton,' a 'thinner Don Quixote.' Nor is he surpassed (even by Macaulay) in his account of the 'tinsel glories' of Strawberry Hill. He would certainly

[1] *Letters* 7. 137; 13 October 1767.

have been the first to call himself a snob, had he known the word, or had it occurred to him to invent it. Meanwhile he made no pretence of concealing his boredom with most things in heaven and earth: to three-quarters of the world he displayed only a polished indifference; most of the rest of it he openly despised, but it was that he might have the more attention for the few whom he found worth while. His career in the Parisian salons, which has been already described, his repudiation of the *philosophes* and the complete absorption of his interest in Madame du Deffand, are really typical of the man and of his entire career. If to be loyal through life to a few friends, to expend one's genius in giving them delight — 'spreading one's leaf gold over them and making them shine' — is to be a snob, then Walpole richly deserves the name.

There is no lack of naturalness in Walpole's relations with his friends. He always 'lets himself go,' to a degree, indeed, that is surprising when one recalls that he knew all along that his letters would one day be printed. Like Johnson,[1] he feared the press, which, he says, 'exceeds even the day of Judgement, for it brings to light everybody's faults, and a good deal more.'[2] He was in nervous dread that his letters to Madame du Deffand would get into print, and made the poor lady wretched by harping upon his fear; on the other hand, he himself collected and prepared certain of his letters for print; and yet, in spite of all this, there is nothing

[1] Boswell's *Life* 4. 102.

[2] *Letters* 8. 427; 23 February 1774.

of restraint in his style or of caution in his words. He never sues for the good opinion of posterity by adopting a judicial tone, but is always delightfully himself. He knew that his letters to Sir Horace Mann, which extend through forty-five years with hardly a break, would one day be an invaluable record of public events,[1] and was concerned that it should be kept intact; yet for all that he is never betrayed into the manner of the archivist. So strong, indeed, is Walpole's individualism, so wayward his humour, that it is sometimes rash to use his letters as documentary evidence.

There is, perhaps, no species of literature more exposed to misinterpretation than the familiar letter. It may almost be stated as a general law of the species that in proportion as a letter is suited for print and for public reading, it is a poor thing. A letter is, by its very nature, not addressed to an audience, but to an individual; and as certainly as it becomes general in its appeal, it loses that intimacy of tone which is its peculiar charm. What is duller than an 'open letter'? What is more chilling than a postscript which invites you, when you have read a letter, to pass it on to John and to Mary? Not there shall you find anything of

[1] These letters he prepared for the press after they had been returned to him by Mann. In August 1784 he wrote: 'I have been counting how many letters I have written to you since I landed in England in 1741: they amount — astonishing! — to above eight hundred; and we have not met in three-and-forty years! A correspondence of near half a century is, I suppose, not to be paralleled in the annals of the post office!' *Letters* 13. 182.

that conversation apart which constitutes the joy of writing as of reading letters. The letter which is intelligible to everybody is already impersonal and almost professional in tone, and you may print it with impunity; but a letter which is addressed to a friend will, in proportion to its intimacy, teem with allusions, oddities of phrase, and obscure references which make full sense only to the recipient, and you will print it at your peril. Lockhart, who declined to 'Boswellize' Scott, has given full expression to this fact, contending that if conversation is not to be misunderstood, 'it is a necessary pre-requisite that we should be completely familiar with all the interlocutors, and understand thoroughly all their minutest relations, and points of common knowledge. . . . In proportion as a man is witty and humorous, there will always be about him and his a widening maze and wilderness of cues and catchwords, which the uninitiated will, if they are bold enough to try interpretation, construe, ever and anon, egregiously amiss — not seldom into arrant falsity.' Now all this is at least as true of letter-writing [1] as of conversation. It is, one might argue, never safe to

[1] In sending to Mason the letters which Gray had written to him, Walpole wrote: 'I need not say that there are several things you will find it necessary to omit. . . . It is much better to give them [the public] nothing, than what they do not comprehend and which they consequently misunderstand, because they will think they comprehend, and which, therefore, must mistake. I do not know whether it is not best that good writings should appear very late, for they who by being nearest in time are nearest to understanding them, are also nearest to misapprehending.' *Letters* 8. 202; 19 September 1772.

attempt to understand a familiar letter until you know all about the author of it, and almost as much about the recipient; for the letter is but the resultant of the first force working upon the second.

It is obvious, therefore, that no good letter should ever be printed. A published letter courts all manner of misconstruction, and exacts premature payment for those idle words whereof we are one day to give account. Few men would willingly yield up the intimacies of their private correspondence to the cruelty of public scrutiny and criticism; it is disturbing to think how much of our published correspondence would perish if the wish of the writer could effect it.

And yet it is this very unsuitability for print, it is this baffling intimacy, the covert allusions, the obscure language of friendship, that attract us to published correspondence. The pleasure in reading it is the fun of seeing, once in your life, what was never intended for your eye. Every printed letter seems to reproach us in its revelation of a trust betrayed. There is thus something almost unholy in the joy of reading published letters. It is never quite a respectable thing to be doing. There is something of the eavesdropper in it; it savours of intrusion and at times even of listening at keyholes. One must be a kind of busybody to find out what it all means. Sprightly letters are often as obscure as an overheard conversation: witness the following extract from a letter of Walpole to Thomas Gray:

George Selwyn says I may, if I please, write Historic Doubts on the present Duke of G. too. Indeed they would be doubts, for I know nothing certainly.

There is wit here and more than one sly allusion; but it is only by prying rather deeply into old scandals that you discover the full meaning of the passage. Familiar correspondence soon comes to need a wealth of annotation. Walpole speaks of certain letters of Gray to him as not 'printable yet,' on the ground that they are 'too obscure without many notes.' [1] But all the editorial art in the world will not restore the quondam lustre. 'If one's tongue,' Walpole writes to George Montagu, 'don't move in the steps of the day, it is only an object of ridicule, like Mrs. Hobart in her cottillon.' The brilliancy of this passage is bound up with the precarious fame of Mrs. Hobart, nay, with the yet more precarious fame of her dancing. Its elusiveness is an indication of the unfathomable quality in letters.

Walpole was himself an insatiable reader of letters, and understood and analyzed his ruling passion:

Fools! yes, I think all the world is turned fool, or was born so; *cette tête à perruque*, that wig-block the Chancellor, what do you think he has done? Burnt all his father's correspondence with Pope, Swift, Arbuthnot &c. — why do you think? because several of the letters were indiscreet. To be sure he thought they would go and publish themselves, if not burnt, but indeed I suspect the indiscretion was that there were some truths which it was not proper to preserve, considering *con-*

[1] *Letters* 8. 376; 8 December 1773.

siderandis. That is just what I should like to have seen. There was otherwise so much discretion, and so little of anything else except hypocrisy in all the letters of those men that have appeared, that I should not so much regret what discreet folly has now burnt. Apropos, did I ever tell you a most admirable *bon mot* of Mr. Bentley? He was talking to me of an old devout Lady St. John, who burnt a whole trunk of letters of the famous Lord Rochester, 'for which,' said Mr. Bentley, 'her soul is now burning in heaven.' The oddness, confusion and wit of the idea struck me of all things.[1]

'That is just what I should like to have seen' — there is the passion of the letter-monger. It was all very indiscreet, no doubt, but 'that is just what I should like to have seen.' The indiscretion is the best proof that the correspondence was intimate, that it was not a mere series of messages nor a volume of essays. To burn it was an eminently safe thing to do with it — and eminently deplorable.

A good letter-writer, a Walpole, a Lamb, is hardly more concerned with the cause of edification than with the cause of discretion. His concern is with the news. He moves genially along the lower levels of life, content to ramble rather than to soar, and forgets high philosophies and abstract truths. What he offers his friend is companionship, not education. The news of yesterday is frequently a harder thing to get at than the learning of the ages, and all the wisdom of the east will not make a good letter.

[1] *Letters* 9. 308; 21 December 1775.

This ideal of familiar correspondence was fully stated in the eighteenth century. It would be possible to construct a whole philosophy of the subject by marshalling a series of quotations from eighteenth century letters. Even the bluestockings appreciated the artlessness of letters. Hannah More never wrote wiser sentences than these:

> If I want wisdom, sentiment or information, I can find them much better in books than in letters. What I want in a letter is a picture of my friend's mind, and the common sense of his life. I want to know what he is saying and doing: I want him to turn out the inside of his heart to me, without disguise, without appearing better than he is, without writing for a character. I have the same feeling in writing to him. My letter is therefore worth nothing to an indifferent person, but it is of value to my friend who cares for me.[1]

Madame du Deffand, no unworthy successor of Madame de Sévigné, would have subscribed to all this. She, too, thought that physics and metaphysics had no place in correspondence, and detested the letters of Abelard and Heloïse because they lacked the note of intimacy and were filled with fustian, '*faux, exagéré, dégoûtant.*' She begs Walpole to fill his letters with trifles, to send news of his dogs, Vachette and Rosette, to describe his curios, and to omit politics. 'J'aime tous les détails domestiques. . . . Dans les lettres de Madame de Sévigné c'est un des articles qui me plaît le plus.'[2] Here was a correspondent worthy of Walpole's quill.

[1] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 51; cf. 1. 235.

[2] *Lettres à Walpole* 1. 591; 4 July 1769.

It was long the custom to sneer at Walpole for his gossip. Lord Macaulay did not fail to ridicule him for it in language as unmeasured as that of scandal itself; but Macaulay's manner is now giving way to apologies and vindications hardly less damaging. Walpole was indubitably and incorrigibly a gossip — why should we avoid the word? He did not avoid it. He was, on the contrary, the first to make the charge. As early as 1749 he calls his letters to Horace Mann 'gossiping gazettes'; yet these are perhaps as little open to the charge as any letters that he wrote. The same charge was brought against Walpole's idol, Madame de Sévigné. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu could find in her letters nothing but gossip — 'sometimes the tittle-tattle of a fine lady; sometimes that of an old nurse, always tittle-tattle.' [1] A similar charge may be brought against Cowper, Lamb, Jane Carlyle, and all favourite letter-writers. It is always ready to hand for those who prefer disquisitions to news. As for Walpole's letters, they might almost be conceived as a delightful defence of the vice.

Now gossip is of course a very dreadful business; but its most hardened opponents can scarcely deny that it has at times been the staple of some very fine literature indeed. What is Pepys but gossip? What would Boswell be without his gossip? Even work that professes to attack gossip is often interesting chiefly for its illustration of what it denounces. Look at the

[1] *Letters*, ed. Thomas, 2. 257; 20 July 1754.

career of Lady Teazle. As long as she retains her place in the Scandal School, she is human, almost lovable, and wholly delightful; but as soon as she is reformed, she becomes quite insignificant. Her entrance in the fifth act is the dullest moment in the play, and her demeanour is wholly unconvincing and perhaps untruthful. One cannot think of her apart from her glittering geysers of scandal; when she gives up gossip she is as dull as Maria, and we are glad that the play is over. If there is a more depressing spectacle than a bird that has lost its wings, it is a wit that has bridled the tongue.

Gossip, in its milder stages, may even denote a serene interest in the little affairs of life, which is truly admirable. Cowper's letters, which Lady Mary would no doubt have found quite as filled with tittle-tattle as Madame de Sévigné's, are in the truest sense of the term the treasure of the humble. The finest things in them are, like the finest things in *The Task*, the description of domestic trifles. The most delightful letter Cowper ever wrote describes a runaway rabbit. Cowper's eminence as a letter-writer is an invaluable illustration of the fact that a man may be a master of this art though his life contains nothing of excitement or romance. The great explorers and adventurers have seldom been good letter-writers. Macaulay laughed at Walpole because he made a serious business of trifles; but it is in this very fact that half the delight of Walpole's letters consists. Neither Walpole nor

Cowper could have written the letters he did without that love; the one lends as much interest to crossing the Channel as to crossing the Alps, and the other amuses us as much with the loss of a rabbit as with the finding of a continent. Like Biron in conversation,

> His eye begets occasion for his wit;
> For every object that the one doth catch,
> The other turns to a mirth-moving jest,
> Which his fair tongue, conceit's expositor,
> Delivers in such apt and gracious words,
> That aged ears play truant at his tales,
> And younger hearings are quite ravished;
> So sweet and voluble is his discourse.

The display of such a wit as this is all the more delightful in a letter because of the very intimacy of the thing. It is not done to amuse a company, but to delight a friend. Every true letter is a gift. If it rises to the plane of literature, it is literature created in honour of an individual, and is his to cherish or destroy. It is thus the most personal and private of all literary types, since it is the only one that can be held to be the peculiar and exclusive property of an individual. A lover of letters is as jealous as he is insatiable. Like Madame du Deffand with the letters of Walpole, he is always looking about for somebody with whom to share his pleasures, and is for ever discovering that no one is worthy of the honour;[1] and, like her, his

[1] 'J'aurais bien du plaisir de pouvoir lire vos lettres avec quelqu'un qui en sentirait le mérite et avec qui j'en pourrais rire.' *Lettres à Walpole* 1. 9; 21 April 1766.

passion is such that he would give the two letters that he has for the one which he is awaiting. The secret of such a jealous sense of ownership as this lies in the fact that every intimate letter is really suffused with two personalities, one of which is that of the recipient.

Such intimate correspondence as this was not without an effect upon English literature. The idealization of intimacy which made it possible spread the love of simplicity and of a more familiar tone. The type was, oddly enough, at one with the new romanticism in this demand for the natural. The style in which it was expressed is fifty years ahead of its time, and already prophesies the more familiar tone of such men as Lamb and Hazlitt. The following passage from Walpole is typical:

> Every summer one lives in a state of mutiny and murmur, and I have found the reason. It is because we will affect to have a summer, and we have no title to any such thing. Our poets learned their trade of the Romans, and so adopted the terms of their masters. They talk of shady groves, purling streams, and cooling breezes, and we get sore throats and agues with attempting to realize these visions. Master Damon writes a song and invites Miss Chloe to enjoy the cool of the evening, and the deuce a bit have we of any such thing as a cool evening. Zephyr is a north-east wind that makes Damon button up to the chin, and pinches Chloe's nose till it is red and blue; and then they cry, 'This is a bad summer' — as if we ever had any other. The best sun we have is made of Newcastle coal, and I am determined never to reckon upon any other. We ruin ourselves with inviting over foreign trees, and make our houses clamber up hills to look at prospects.

How our ancestors would laugh at us, who knew there was no being comfortable unless you had a high hill before your nose and a thick warm wood at your back![1]

If the style of nineteenth century prose marks an improvement over that of the eighteenth century in respect of sprightliness, then surely such a passage as this must be held to indicate the progress towards it.

It is amazing how wide-spread was the knowledge of this craft. There are scores of letter-writers at the end of the century who may be read with pleasure. Even Mrs. Montagu could descend from the heights long enough to write in this pleasant tone to Mrs. Garrick and Miss More:

Most engaged and engaging ladies, will you drink tea with me on Thursday with a very small party? I think it an age, not a golden age, since I saw you last.[2]

With the presence of such letter-writers as Cowper, Johnson, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and Horace Walpole, not to mention countless minor names, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the familiar letter was the chosen medium of the age, as the periodic essay was of the earlier period and as the drama was of the Elizabethan age. It will always remain the best general record of the social life of the century; but its value is more particular than this. You may read the boisterous life of the age in its novels, you may find its

[1] *Letters* 7. 195; 15 June 1768.
[2] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 253; 1782.

solidity in Johnson and its superficiality in Chesterfield; you may see its rags in Hogarth or its grace in Reynolds; but for its simplicity, its affectionate intimacies, and its smiling ease, you must turn to its letters.

CHAPTER XIV

Fanny Burney and the Art of the Diarist

The Diary of Fanny Burney cannot, like the conversation of Johnson and the correspondence of Walpole, be cited as perhaps the finest specimen of its kind. Of the arts we are discussing, the diarist's is the most difficult to define or characterize; for at one extreme, it may shrink into the dulness of a calendar, and at the other, it may record the agonies of a soul's attempt to be honest with its God or with itself. Kinds so distinct as Pepys's *Diary* and the *Confessions* of Rousseau seem to defy all attempts at common definition. The Diary of Miss Burney, unlike these works, has no psychological problems; but exists for the simple and engaging purpose of recording events of interest. In the beginning she resolved never to mix with her record, her 'religious sentiments, opinions, hopes, fears, beliefs, or aspirations;[1] but to reserve her Diary for worldly dross.' If not among the greatest diaries of the world, it is among the most normal; and it is not impossible to define it roughly. Diaries of this kind may be described as a sort of letter to oneself.

Miss Burney's Diary was, however, written to be

[1] 4. 288.

read by others than herself. It was addressed to her sisters, to whom sections of it were despatched from time to time. It partakes, therefore, in large measure of the nature of private correspondence, and much that has been said of that type applies obviously to this. But there are important differences. The greatness of the Diary certainly does not consist in the delightful treatment of domestic and personal trifles. Nor does Miss Burney paint highly for the mere love of painting, as the conversationalist and the letter-writer often do. She is not communicating herself, but the important life with which she is in touch. She does not so much wish that the reader should see her, as that he should see with her eyes — and her artistic vision was remarkably shrewd and keen. The Diary is thus a panorama rather than a portrait. We read diaries either to get at the personality of the writer or at the events described. The character of Fanny Burney, combining sweetness, shyness, wisdom, and pride, presents no particular problems, and is not of commanding interest. What she saw and what she heard, the people who loved her, who attached her to them, and who, not unfrequently, preyed upon her — these constitute the interest of the book; it is these and the art with which they are set before us that make the Diary what it is.

The thought that is for ever borne in upon the reader is that Miss Burney was a very lucky woman. Suffering as she did from shyness and an inflamed sense of

propriety, it might easily have been her lot to lead a life as secluded as that of her friend, Mr. Crisp of Chessington; yet in fact Johnson himself did not commonly associate with more people whom one would like to have known. The young lady's unassuming manner was of actual value in increasing her circle of desirable acquaintance, when once she was famous. When once she was famous, I repeat, for most of her interesting friends and experiences came to her as the result of her celebrity and of the bluestocking patronage which ensued upon it. It was Mrs. Thrale who drew Fanny Burney into the great world which she was to adorn and to record; but the interest of Mrs. Thrale went out rather to the author of *Evelina*, than to the mouse-like young lady of St. Martin Street. Seldom has so timid an entry into the literary world been accorded a reception so flattering. The young woman who had disposed of her novel under cover of night and anonymity, as though it had been so much stolen goods, was presently to find that she had every bluestocking in London at her feet, and that the King of Letters was proclaiming her the equal of Fielding. One speculates what would have become of her if she had begun her career with *The Wanderer* instead of *Evelina*. She had the luck to write her best novel — some will say her only good novel — first; and from that happy beginning sprang all the rest of her good fortune.

It is to be remembered by those who study Miss

Burney's career that the appearance of *Evelina*, in 1778, marks a definite period in the history of woman's contribution to English literature. Johnson's estimate of the book was of course ludicrously wrong, and it is well to assume that his chivalry (for once) got the better of his judgment; yet it is impossible to deny the superlative significance of the book. It was the greatest creative work that had yet been produced by an Englishwoman. It is still read with delight by people who never heard of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, Miss Fielding's *Peter Simple*, or Charlotte Lennox's *Female Quixote*. The bluestockings were right in feeling that the author had forced a new estimate of the sex. The respect for her work was universal: extravagant things — impossibilities — were expected of her.

It was now that Miss Burney's modesty (so carefully nurtured) was felt to be but an added grace. The most vicious satirist could discover in 'little Burney' nothing of the arrogance of a *femme savante*. She gave the impression of hating her talents and the fame which had been thrust upon her. Her unassuming demeanour and her youthful sweetness (for she was still girlish at twenty-six) made her the delight of every drawing-room she would consent to enter, and not unfrequently brought down upon her admiration and social attentions which she would have been happier without. At last, in an unhappy hour, they brought her to the attention of Queen Charlotte. But for the moment, all was sweetness and triumph and popularity. Her position among

the bluestockings is noticeable; she was beloved of them all. She was loyal to Mrs. Thrale without sacrificing the regard of Mrs. Montagu or in any way offending her beloved Mrs. Ord. She almost reconciled stiff old Mrs. Delany and the dear Duchess of Portland to literary eminence in a woman. Outside this circle she was no less esteemed. Johnson loved her as a daughter, and professed himself glad to 'send his name down to posterity' linked with hers. Burke, who read *Evelina* repeatedly, distinguished her by a special greeting when she appeared at the trial of Warren Hastings, as, indeed, did the prisoner himself. Wyndham delighted to converse with her by the hour. Walpole received her at Strawberry Hill, and was no less pleased with her unpretentious manner than with the fact that Mrs. Montagu now had a superior. Had Miss Burney cared to open a salon, she might have reigned over these men like a more rational Lespinasse. The more her fortune is dwelt upon, the more obvious it becomes. As a child she had had David Garrick for a grown-up playmate; as a young woman she had the privilege of welcoming Sarah Siddons to the court; later in life, she conversed on terms of intimacy with Madame de Stael. She had passed the day in Reynolds's studio, and had looked at the stars through the glass of Herschel. She was visited at Windsor by Boswell, proof-sheets in hand; and Sheridan, at the height of his reputation, repeatedly invited her to write a comedy. She described her

acquaintance to Queen Charlotte as being 'not only very numerous, but very mixed, taking in not only most stations in life, but also most parties.' [1] We may marvel at the fact that the shy Fanny Burney became a novelist; but she could hardly help becoming a diarist.

Even the great misfortune of her life really contributed to her greatness. Her life at Court, which half killed her, a life which she repeatedly calls 'monastic' and describes as 'dead and tame' — strong words from one who thought she adored the Queen — enabled her to depict a kind of life which, dull as it was, can never lack significance. If for no more important reason, her account of it will always be read as one of the great dramas of disillusion. It furnished Macaulay with material for one of his most brilliant extravaganzas. Like him, we read the third and fourth volume of the Diary, which detail that life, with feelings of rage at the royal gaolers and at the Hanoverian ideals of conduct that they almost succeeded in imposing upon her. The Queen's obvious delight in checking Miss Burney's literary activity and in stiffening her sense of propriety (which needed no stiffening) makes it difficult to control the judgment; and yet, upon reflection, it will be seen that the reader's rage is but a tribute to one of the most effective pieces of realism in the language. It is true that it is often dull, but so is realism. It is true that Miss Burney's adulation of the Royal Family is

[1] *Diary* 3. 181.

at times painfully fulsome; but even this only heightens the description of that life which, despite all adulation, she found unendurable. The story of her captivity is no less thrilling than that of Pamela in the clutches of Mrs. Jewkes.

As a delineation of an ogress, Mrs. Schwellenberg is at once more horrible and more lifelike than Mrs. Jewkes; beside her, all the 'weatherbeaten old she-dragons' of eighteenth century fiction and drama pale into insignificance. Miss Burney has often been praised for creating the character of Madame Duval, but that lady is a mere commonplace when compared with the spiteful old crone who had no interest above piquet and who divided the slight remnant of affection of which her withered nature was capable between her royal owner and her tame frogs. Her ambitions for Fanny Burney, the idol of the blues, was that she should learn piquet, give up writing, and become like unto herself, a spaniel of the backstairs. Few characters in literature are at once so comic and so loathsome.

It might be assumed that the depiction of Mrs. Schwellenberg were the result of mere dislike, if Miss Burney had not, at the same moment, been proving by her portrayal of Queen Charlotte that her vision was never more keen and her judgment of character never more unbiassed. She had no intention whatever of analyzing her mistress. As a lover of royal families, she was far more prone to idealize her; but for all that she had a genius for truthfulness, and could not

help mirroring the royal nature with a fatal accuracy. It is the revelation of such royalty as can conceive no happiness apart from its own presence, of a queenly etiquette in which a native sweetness is lost in acquired selfishness. For subtlety and moderation this characterization is unsurpassed in its own century, and not often equalled in the century that followed it, for all its psychology and realism.

The triumph of Miss Burney's realism over her personal inclination may be illustrated by setting side by side two sentences drawn from the same entry in the Diary for December 1790: 'Her Majesty was very kind during this time, and the Princesses interested themselves about me with a sweetness very grateful to me.' This is the expression of what is proper from the Keeper of the Robes; but on the next page it shrivels away before her sense of actuality: 'Though I was frequently so ill in her presence that I could scarcely stand, I saw she concluded me, while life remained, inevitably hers.'

These court-episodes in the Diary of Miss Burney are of special use in showing her powers of characterization. The earlier sections of the book deal with people no less interesting, but so familiar to us from other sources that Miss Burney's skill in depicting them is not so readily perceived. No particular surprise mingles with our pleasure as we read of Johnson and of Mrs. Thrale, of Reynolds and of Mrs. Montagu, because the author's art seems but to reflect, at most

He then said it was necessary to drink the Queen's health.

The gentlemen here made no demur, though Mr. De Luc arched his eyebrows in expressive fear of consequences.

'A bumper,' cried the Duke, 'to the Queen's gentleman-usher.'

They all stood up and drank the Queen's health.

'Here are three of us,' cried the Duke, 'all belonging to the Queen: the Queen's philosopher, the Queen's gentleman-usher, and the Queen's son; but, thank Heaven, I'm nearest!'

'Sir,' cried Mr. Stanhope, a little affronted, 'I am not now the Queen's gentleman-usher; I am the Queen's equerry, sir.'

'A glass more of Champagne here! What are you all so slow for? Where are all my rascals gone? They've put me in one passion already this morning. Come, a glass of Champagne for the Queen's gentleman-usher!' laughing heartily.

'No, sir,' repeated Mr. Stanhope, 'I am equerry now!'

'And another glass to the Queen's philosopher!'

Neither gentleman objected; but Mrs. Schwellenburg, who had sat laughing and happy all this time, now grew alarmed, and said, 'Your Royal Highness, I am afraid for the ball!'

'Hold your potato-jaw, my dear,' cried the Duke, patting her; but recollecting himself, he took her hand and pretty abruptly kissed it, and then, flinging it hastily away, laughed aloud, and called out, 'There! that will make amends for anything, so now I may say what I will. So here! a glass of Champagne for the Queen's philosopher and the Queen's gentleman-usher! Hang me if it will not do them a monstrous deal of good!'

Here news was brought that the equipage was in order. He started up, calling out, 'Now, then, for my —— tailor.'[1]

[1] *Diary* 4. 471 ff.; 4 June 1791.

Scenes as vivid, though not so uproarious, might be cited in every chapter of the work; to quote them all would be to print half the Diary. The selection here given is sufficient to show why Miss Burney's writing is invariably referred to as dramatic. The Diary is, in parts, so like a novel as to prompt the query whether it is at all reliable as a record of facts. Did not the author's imagination play freely over the events? Did she not select, arrange, and colour according to the demands of art rather than of history? Are the conversations not improved? Is not the diarist a novelist still? Questions of this large kind can hardly be answered save in a large, impressionistic way. The Diary is, in general, a truthful document and a reliable account of the life which it records. A mere glance at the book will reveal the fact that Miss Burney had little of Boswell's passion for literalness, for accurate dates, and for written evidence. But Boswell was unique in his generation, and Boswell was a lawyer. Miss Burney was writing to amuse her sisters, not to inform the public; but there are passages which show that she was endowed with a remarkably accurate memory. She once has occasion [1] to quote a letter from memory; a comparison of it with the original, which happens to be in existence, reveals no evidence of misinterpretation, and shows the copy to be, in fact, very nearly a literal reproduction of the original. We are to remember that Miss Burney had been in the

[1] *Diary*, 19 November 1783.

habit of keeping a diary, recording conversations which had interested her, ever since the age of fifteen; and that this had strengthened her memory as well as her powers of observation. It was to a similar practice that Boswell owed his ability to record conversation with accuracy; and he himself asserted that the ability grew with practice. There is no reason for supposing that the results in one case were radically different from those in the other. Certain it is that Miss Burney's record of Johnson's conversation is in no way inconsistent with Boswell's. To say that in describing life at Streatham or at the Court she used her skill in selection and that she employed the judgment of a novelist in beginning and ending a conversation effectively is merely to repeat that the Diary is a work of art. Judgment in the choice of facts to set down need not indicate a misinterpretation of them.

There is but one quality in Miss Burney which shakes the reader's confidence in her judgment of character. There is a tendency to emotionalism in her which the irreverent will term gush. She was touched with the sentimentality of her times. The tear of sensibility is ever trembling in her eyes. Her affection for Mrs. Thrale, Mrs. Locke, Mrs. Delany, and most other ladies, for 'dear Daddy Crisp,' for 'dear Sir Joshua,' is so effusive as to make all terms of endearment seem tawdry.

Hardly less distressing than this mawkishness is the lady's self-consciousness, which she mistook for the

virtue of modesty. The flattery which brought the blush of shame to her cheek and kept her on the verge of swooning, the flattery which made her shrink into corners or retire in confusion from the scene, the praise which was too gross for her ears, all this is written down *in extenso* and with something unpleasantly like gusto. It flows through the Diary like an apocalyptic river of honey. Macaulay reminds us, quite properly, that all this was 'for the eyes of two or three persons who had loved her from infancy, who had loved her in obscurity, and to whom her fame gave the purest and most exquisite delight.' This is true, no doubt; but might not father and sisters have achieved delight without this surfeit of sweetness, 'whereof a little more than a little is by much too much'? It is all very human, of course, and it would be chivalrous to forget it. But all the chivalry in the world cannot hide the fact that it is a serious blot on the art of the Diary, a blot that we cannot but wish away from so splendid a work.

CHAPTER XV

Boswell and the Art of Intimate Biography

It is the privilege of few men in any age to raise an art to such perfection that it becomes in effect a new thing. The development of intimate biography is still largely the work of one man. After a hundred years of memorabilia, personal reminiscences, and interviews, Boswell is still as indubitably the greatest of biographers as when he referred to his book as the 'first in the world,' or when, fifty years later, Macaulay applied to him the language of the race-course, and pronounced, 'Eclipse is first, and the rest nowhere.' Later biographers do not eclipse him, nor do earlier ones explain him. A comparison of his work with what went before serves only to reveal his utter uniqueness. If an earlier biographer suggests a point of comparison in his realistic record of conversation, the slightness of his work gives no conception of the whole life he is writing; if another seems like Boswell in refusing to write a mere eulogy, he seems chill and judicial where Boswell is warm with pulsing life. Other lives give us admirable things: table-talk, a portrait, a eulogy, a handful of anecdotes, a list of dates from 'pedigree to funeral,' or a volume of letters; but Boswell gives us all these

BOSWELL THE JOURNALIST

From a series of caricatures of the *Journal* by Rowlandson and Collings

and more. He aspires to be as complete as life itself. Boswell knew and delighted in other biographies; but was hardly influenced by them. He knew Plutarch, Xenophon, and Valerius Maximus, among the ancients, and Jonson's *Timber*, Selden's *Table-Talk*, and Spence's *Anecdotes*, among modern *ana;* but is like none of these. He surpasses them all in intimacy, variety, and what, for want of a better name, may be called his sustained quality. To read Boswell after these men is like passing to a Flemish painting from a study in black and white.

In so far as he can be said to have learned his art from any man, his master was Johnson himself. The first sentence in the *Life* proclaims Johnson's superiority to all men in writing the lives of others. Biography was often discussed by the two men together, and Boswell was also well acquainted with Johnson's published remarks on the subject. Johnson enunciated, with fair consistency, the theory of intimate biography, but he never fully realized it in any work of his. Thus he was wont to assert that autobiography was superior to biography, for the simple reason that a man might more readily reveal the facts concerning himself. If a man's life is to be written by another than himself, it should be by one who has 'eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him.' The material of biography, he asserts, at various times, to be 'trifles,' the 'delicate features of the mind,' the 'minute peculiarities of conduct,' 'domestic privacies,' and 'the minute

details of daily life.' He approved of much anecdote in biography, used such incidents with a free hand in his own work, and encouraged Boswell to record them. He did not, however, anywhere fully embody his theories. It was, in truth, impossible for him to do so in the *Lives of the Poets*, for, with the exception of Savage, he had been on terms of real intimacy with none of these men. Had he written the life of Goldsmith, as he once thought of doing, he might, if his indolence had not prevented him, have produced such a book as would illustrate his own theories. Yet, in spite of this lack of intimacy in the *Lives of the Poets*, he was attacked for making them too familiar. Potter, Mrs. Montagu's *protégé*, denounced his introduction of trifles into serious biography, considering it beneath the dignity of that art to mention that Pope wore three pairs of stockings to increase the size of his legs, and that he loved to feast on potted lampreys which he heated in a silver saucepan. 'We know,' writes the critic, 'that the greatest men are subject to the infirmities of human nature equally with the meanest; why then are these infirmities recorded?'

This sentence may be taken to summarize the general conception of biography before Boswell. The death of a man seems to have been regarded as an opportunity for rationalizing his views and perfecting his character. The duty of a biographer was to forget all vices and to idealize all virtues, with the laudable purpose of setting before the public a notable pattern of conduct. 'He

that writes the life of another,' wrote Johnson in the *Idler*, 'endeavours to hide the man that he may produce a hero.' Even Johnson never felt quite sure how far it was proper to describe a man's vices in writing his biography. Boswell notes the inconsistency of his views. When the subject of the poet Parnell's drinking arose, Johnson remarked, 'More ill may be done by the example, than good by telling the whole truth'; but at another time he said, 'If a man is to write *A Panegyric*, he may keep vices out of sight; but if he professes to write *A Life*, he must represent it really as it was. . . . It would produce an instructive caution to avoid drinking, when it was seen that even the learning and genius of Parnell could be debased by it.' [1] In practice it is clear that Johnson preferred to err on the side of frankness. Potter was shocked because he revealed the avidity of Addison by repeating the now-hackneyed story of how Steele was forced to pay a debt of £100. If biography is regarded as the handmaid of morality, and eulogy is preferred to actuality, such details are of course worse than useless. Beattie dwells on 'the due distinction between what deserves to be known and what ought to be forgotten.' [2] Miss Burney considered that the publication of letters verbatim was the 'greatest injury' to a man's memory. Horace Walpole, who deplored the whole policy of expurgation, nevertheless gives Mason, the biographer

[1] *Life* 3. 155.

[2] Forbes's *Life of Beattie* 2. 175; 15 November 1785.

of Gray, the conventional advice. He avows that the publication of the life of Gray is an opportunity to establish that poet's character 'unimpeached.' He was shocked at the section of the biography which Mason had submitted to his criticism, because it was honest and frank. 'What can provoke you to be so imprudent? . . . You know my idea was that your work should consecrate his name.' [1] Once such a theory of consecration is adopted, the author of a life is driven relentlessly towards panegyric; for, not daring to trust the public to interpret facts, he must suppress everything that is not admirable, lest the mention of even the slightest fault be taken to point to the existence of thousands that are passed over in silence. When once you have taken to varnishing, you must varnish thoroughly, for any cracks or bare spots which reveal the material beneath ruin your whole effect.

To a public with these lofty notions of propriety Boswell, genially sacrificing what little was left to him of his reputation, addressed, in 1785, his *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson* . . . 'containing . . . A series of his Conversation, Literary Anecdotes and Opinions of Men and Books.' It was a jumble of gossip such as readers had hitherto seen only in the twopenny pamphlets of the scandalmongers of Grub Street; but was set forth with an abundance of detail which captured the most frivolous

[1] *Letters* 8. 443; 17 April 1774.

and an air of authenticity which convinced the most sceptical. It depicted a great man who had been in his grave but a few months. It was written with veneration, but wholly without awe, as though a valet had collaborated with the Recording Angel. It flouted all restraints, and passed the most distant limits of decency. Nothing like it had ever been heard of. Even in our own day, to a world whose nerves have been jaded by a thousand *exposés*, such a book would come as a surprise, but to the world of 1786 it was a revelation of new possibilities in literature, as alarming as they were entertaining. With all the frankness of Pepys the author combines the conscious skill of one who has mastered the art of anecdote and the joy of a conceited man who realizes that he is about to attain fame by one of the by-paths of literature. It was difficult, in 1785, to say whether Johnson's theory of familiar biography had been realized or travestied in this book. It was obvious that he had been hoist with his own petard. The world was informed with the most scrupulous accuracy of how he said his prayers and how he was persuaded to wear a woollen night-cap. His idlest word was recorded as though in a dictograph. 'I have often thought that if I kept a seraglio, the ladies should all wear linen gowns, — or cotton; I mean stuffs made of vegetable substances. I would have no silk; you cannot tell when it is clean, . . .' and so forth. At times the book is hardly quotable. Once when about to get into a dirty bed, during their travels

in the Hebrides, Boswell remarks: 'We had much hesitation, whether to undress, or lye down with our clothes on. I said at last, "I'll plunge in! There will be less harbour for vermin about me when I'm stripped" — Dr. Johnson said, he was like one hesitating to go into the cold bath. At last he resolved too.' The first sensation of the reader of such amazing stuff as this is that Boswell was engaged in a deliberate attempt to degrade a great man. He was accused by a writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine*[1] of having 'exposed and cut up' his hero 'in the most shameful and cruel manner.' That Boswell had a kind of mischievous delight in what he was doing, no one need take the trouble to tell us; but that he was a sort of skilful blackmailer is now unthinkable. He felt that he was doing the world a service in showing that a great man was human; and time has proved that he was right. 'There is something noble,' Johnson had remarked to him, 'in publishing truth, though it condemns one's self.' Boswell paid this price. He made Johnson permanently familiar by making himself almost permanently notorious. Witness the following extract:

> Dr. Johnson went to bed soon. When one bowl of punch was finished, I rose, and was near the door, in my way up stairs to bed; but Corrichatachin said, it was the first time Col had been in his house, and he should have his bowl — and would not I join in drinking it? The heartiness of my honest landlord, and the

[1] May 1786.

desire of doing social honour to our very obliging conductor, induced me to sit down again. Col's bowl was finished; and by that time we were well warmed. A third bowl was soon made, and that too was finished. We were cordial, and merry to a high degree; but of what passed I have no recollection, with any accuracy. I remember calling *Corrichatachin* by the familiar appellation of *Corri*, which his friends do. A fourth bowl was made, by which time Col, and young M'Kinnon, Corrichatachin's son, slipped away to bed. I continued a little with Corri and Knockow; but at last I left them. It was near five in the morning when I got to bed.

Sunday, September 26.

I awaked at noon, with a severe head-ach. I was much vexed that I should have been guilty of such a riot, and afraid of a reproof from Dr. Johnson. I thought it very inconsistent with that conduct which I ought to maintain, while the companion of the Rambler. About one he came into my room, and accosted me, 'What, drunk yet?' His tone of voice was not that of severe upbraiding; so I was relieved a little. 'Sir, (said I,) they kept me up.' He answered, 'No, you kept them up, you drunken dog:' — This he said with good-humoured *English* pleasantry. Soon afterwards, Corrichatachin, Col, and other friends assembled round my bed. Corri had a brandy-bottle and glass with him, and insisted I should take a dram. 'Ay, said Dr. Johnson, fill him drunk again. Do it in the morning, that we may laugh at him all day. It is a poor thing for a fellow to get drunk at night, and sculk to bed, and let his friends have no sport.' Finding him thus jocular, I became quite easy; and when I offered to get up, he very good naturedly said, 'You need be in no such hurry now.' I took my host's advice, and drank some brandy, which I found an effectual cure for my head-ach. When I rose, I went into Dr. Johnson's room, and taking up Mrs. M'Kinnon's Prayer-book, I opened it at the twentieth Sunday after Trinity, in the epistle

for which I read, 'And be not drunk with wine, wherein there is excess.' Some would have taken this as a divine interposition.

Such writing as this at once divided the reading public into hostile camps. There were many who considered the book delightful; others considered it a new kind of libel. It became the subject of a long controversy in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. In the December following its appearance, Boswell was accused of 'betraying private conversations even of the most trivial kind.' In May, the tastes of a 'gossiping age' were denounced as well. By December 1786, the sale of the book having gone triumphantly forward, Boswell was reminded that his popularity was due solely to the general interest in Johnson; the sale of his work was compared to the consumption of potatoes in a time of famine; and the public was instructed that such works require for their composition nothing but an ear and a memory.

In the spring of the same year, soon after the appearance of Mrs. Piozzi's *Anecdotes*, Walpole wrote to Mann:

She and Boswell and their hero are the joke of the public. A Dr. Wolcot, *soi-disant* Peter Pindar, has published a burlesque eclogue,[1] in which Boswell and the signora are the interlocutors, and all the absurdest passages in the works of both are ridiculed. The printshops teem with satiric prints on them: one, in which Boswell, as a monkey, is riding on Johnson, the bear,[2]

[1] *Bozzy and Piozzi*, or the British Biographers, A Town Eclogue, 1786.

[2] This caricature is too unseemly to admit of reproduction here.

BOSWELL HAUNTED BY THE GHOST OF JOHNSON

From a contemporary caricature

has this witty inscription, 'My friend *delineavit.*' — But enough of these mountebanks! [1]

Other caricatures represented the ghost of Johnson haunting Boswell while he pieced together his *Journal* from various rags of reminiscence, and the bust of Johnson frowning down upon Boswell and Mrs. Piozzi as they wrote. Rowlandson and Collings later made the *Tour* the subject of a series of sixteen caricatures.

In 1786, moreover, a pamphlet appeared entitled, *A Poetical Epistle from the Ghost of Dr. Johnson to his Friends,* in which Boswell was satirized together with Strahan, Courtenay, and Mrs. Piozzi. The verses were elaborately annotated with quotations from the *Journal,* and Boswell was addressed by the manes of Johnson in these words:

> How oft I mark'd thee, like a watchful cat,
> List'ning to catch up all my silly chat;
> How oft that chat I still more silly made,
> To see it in thy commonplace conveyed.

This was the invariable charge against the book. It was a mass of small talk collected by a man with a retentive memory, 'not to do honour to his [Johnson's] memory, by judiciously selecting the best and most striking of his sentences, but with a design to show his own assiduity in exhibiting the Doctor in the most glaring colours of inconsistency.' [2]

There was a secondary charge against the book. It

[1] *Letters* 13. 379; 30 April 1786.

[2] *Remarks on the Journal of a Tour* . . . in a Letter to James Boswell, Esq. By 'Verax.' 1785.

was conceived as a libel on living people.[1] Various persons — the Duchess of Hamilton, Sir Alexander MacDonald, and many of those who had entertained the travellers in the Hebrides — discovered in the book remarks about themselves that were anything but palatable. A reference to Mrs. Thrale created the greatest excitement. Johnson's remark that she could not get through Mrs. Montagu's *Essay on Shakespeare* was there for all the world to read. She protested in her *Anecdotes;* but Boswell reminded her, in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine,* that she had read his *Journal* in manuscript, without complaining of this, and that he was but quoting Johnson's own words regarding her. So ended one controversy. It was not the only one.

But perhaps the chief excitement rose from the advertisement at the end of the volume, in which Boswell announced that he had but begun his memoirs of Johnson. He proposed presently to 'erect a literary monument worthy of so great an author,' and stated that he had been collecting biographical material for more than twenty years. The promise, for those who had known Johnson, was not gratifying. If Boswell had upset the literary world with an account of three months in Johnson's life, what would he do in recounting seventy-five years of it? Everybody who had known Johnson held his breath for fear. Many urged the new biographer to be cautious. Fanny Burney

[1] Cf. Walpole's remarks about the *Life, Letters* 14. 438; 26 May 1791.

refused to assist him in his work of showing the pleasanter side of Johnson's character, and wrote in her Diary,[1] 'I feel sorry to be named or remembered by that biographical, anecdotical memorandummer till his book of poor Dr. Johnson's life is finished and published.' Sir William Forbes, who was distressed because Boswell had quoted his approval of the *Journal*, took the liberty of 'strongly enjoining him' to be more careful about personalities in the later work.[2] He had perhaps never heard Boswell's famous reply to Hannah More, who had urged him to 'mitigate some of Johnson's asperities' when he published the *Journal*. 'He said roughly,' she writes, '"He would not cut off his claws, nor make a tiger a cat to please anybody."'[3] This remark has been hackneyed in every work on Boswell, but it can never be quoted too often, for it is Boswell's reply to the world. There is nothing more to be said.

I have dwelt on the reception of Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* because it is the most effective way of showing the novelty and the magnitude of his achievement. If the author had been any other than James Boswell, critics would long ere this have expatiated on the splendid courage of his undertaking; but he enjoyed and esteemed his own work too highly to elicit such praise. Whatever were Boswell's super-

[1] *Diary* 3. 219; 26 February 1787.
[2] *Life of Beattie* 2. 182; 9 January 1786.
[3] Roberts's *Memoirs of More* 1. 403; 1785.

ficial faults, whatever the resentments that he caused, it is impossible to withhold our admiration from the simple confidence in the letter of the truth that characterized his Scotch soul. His would be the simplicity of childhood if it were not the simplicity of genius. The Lord Bishop of Chester complained [1] that Boswell recorded facts simply because they were facts. Such was indeed the case.

When, in 1791, the *Life* appeared, many of the old charges were repeated and some of the old satires revived; but it is not important to consider them in detail, for the note of admiration, which had been heard now and again in the beginning, when the *Journal* was published, soon became dominant. The other lives and memoirs of Johnson, with which Boswell's former work had often been compared, now served only for purposes of contrast; they were useful in illustrating the greatness of the new work.

What are the characteristics which tended to give the *Life* its place in the history of biography? They are of the simplest kind. Boswell had, as this entire chapter has been designed to show, a passion for completeness. It is hardly necessary to labour this point. Boswell himself writes near the opening of his book: 'I will venture to say that he will be seen in this work more completely than any man who has yet lived.' In this sentence Boswell wrote his own panegyric, as in his reply to Miss More he had pronounced his own

[1] Forbes's *Life of Beattie* 2. 178.

defence. Like everything that he did, the panegyric is not without the ludicrous touch, for he adds: 'Had his other friends been as diligent and ardent as I was, he might have been almost entirely preserved.' He might, indeed; for why should anything be lost, while there is a note-book — and a Boswell? Boswell, I repeat, aspired to the completeness of life itself.

Nor is it greatly necessary to dwell on Boswell's fidelity to fact. It has been often dwelt upon, and, through the labours of Dr. Birkbeck Hill, is now generally admitted; though by one who liked neither Boswell nor Hill the matter has recently been once more called in question.[1] It would seem that a work which in its own day was both praised and denounced for its scrupulous accuracy might have been accepted without question. It is scarcely reasonable to demand a more lifelike biographer than Boswell. His own times readily granted that he had given the true Johnson; that was both the praise and the blame. Pepys, who knew Johnson and had no illusions about him, wrote to Hannah More:

> The Journal is a most faithful picture of him, so faithful that I think anybody who has got a clear idea of his person and manner may know as much of him from that book as by having been acquainted with him(in the usual way) for three years.[2]

[1] It has been reserved for Mr. Percy Fitzgerald to revive the old charges against Boswell and to discover new ones, which he has set forth with a virulence that would be inexcusable in any one who had not a preposterous theory to defend.

[2] *A Later Pepys* 2. 260; 24 October 1785.

This was written before the *Life* appeared. Respecting the later work we have the testimony of Burke to its value as a monument to Johnson's conversation.[1] Even more than this may be said. We have the nearest possible thing to Johnson's own approval. He had himself read the *Journal* in manuscript, and pronounced it a 'very exact picture of a portion of his life.' It is difficult to demand more than this. In the same work Boswell writes:

> He read this day a good deal of my *Journal*, written in a small book with which he had supplied me, and was pleased, for he said, 'I wish thy books were twice as big.' He helped me fill up blanks which I had left in first writing it, when I was not quite sure of what he had said, and he corrected any mistakes that I had made.[2]

In his accurate reproduction of life, Boswell surpasses all the realists and attains to something of the inexhaustibility of nature itself. Delightful as is his book for mere reading, it can never be fully appreciated till it has been used as a work of reference; for such it was intended to be. The work exhibits, according to the title-page, 'a view of literature and literary men in Great Britain for near half a century.' Boswell aspired to be not only stenographer but historian. And to the life that he loved he was both.

We reach at last the core of Boswell's being, his pagan joy in life, that greediness of social pleasure

[1] *Journal*, p. 307.

[2] *Ib.* p. 383.

which explains all his faults and suggests all his greatness. He loved social life as other men have loved a noble woman or a noble cause. He solemnly dedicated his life to it and his genius to the recording of it. Only when his work is viewed in the large does one see its grandeur. Like Ulysses, he might have said, when his great work was done, 'Much have I seen and known, cities of men and manners . . . myself not least but honoured of them all.'

I incline to think that this social avidity is the ruling passion not only of Boswell but of all the life that we have been studying, of the salons, the conversationists, the diarists, and the letter-writers. That life at its best blends two kinds of pleasure that seem ordinarily incompatible, those of society and solitude, of association and reflection. In the 'exchange of mind' which is its ideal, its disciples find a joy that excels the more passive pleasures of reading, by bringing them directly into the creation of its characteristic product, conversation, and to this it adds the pleasure of seeing the immediate effect of one's words. Conversation such as this may be said to represent the active, social, and more human side of the intellectual life, while meditation stands for its contemplative and eremitical side. The two are often mutually exclusive. Philosopher and poet belong to the latter class, because the meditative temper naturally shuns social distractions; but diarists, letter-writers, and biographers owe their very existence to this social instinct, and write to

exalt it. They cannot bear that the delights which they have experienced should pass away without leaving a memorial. They are determined not only to pluck the passing hour, but to do what they can to preserve the blossom even as it droops in their hand. A withered flower is better than none at all; at worst, it is a pathetic reminder of what has been. The memorialist is one whose face is ever towards the past and the glories that have been, the *noctes cœnæque deum*. It is in honour of them that his work is done. His office is to record life, not to transfigure it. He cannot aspire to be among those who have seen visions and pointed others towards them; the joy of poetic creation and the passion of adventurous thought are not for him; but it is his to know men and the cheerful ways of men, and to unite us with the heroic minds of old, not in the lonely glory of their visions, but in their more familiar hours and their more human joys.

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